

PRAYER PUTS POWER IN YOUR LIFE

“Lord, teach us to pray”



“This is the victory (Nike) that overcomes the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

B r o o k y R S t o c k t o n

Prayer Puts Power in Your Life

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
Preface	5
Power in Prayer	6
Faith Puts Power in Your Prayers	7
Mark 9:23-24	7
Teach Us To Pray, I	16
Luke 11:1	16
Teach Us To Pray, II	23
Matthew 6:9	23
Teach Us To Pray, III	30
Matthew 6:12	30
Assurance of Answered Prayer	37
Matthew 7:7-11	37
The Power of United Prayer!	41
Acts 4:24-5:16.....	41
Always to Pray	46
Luke 18:1	46
Prayer as a Legal Pleading	51
Psalm 50:15	51
A Prayer for Insight	57
Ephesians 1:15-23	57
A Prayer for Ability	64
Ephesians 3:14-21	64
A Prayer for Stability	69
Philippians 4:1-9	69
When Prayers Are Unanswered	75
Matthew 15:28.....	75
The Praying Church	82
Acts 12	82
When a Family Prays.....	88
Prayer in Jesus' Name	93
John 14:13.....	93
Watching in Prayer	96
1 Peter 4:7	96
The Ultimate Objective of All Prayers	98
Colossians 4:12	98
Wrestling with God.....	100
Genesis 32.....	100
Stop Praying for Politicians	107
Jeremiah 7:16	107
Praying Against Politicians	115
Proverbs 28:28.....	115
Addendum	118
Psalm 3 - Enemies Rising	119



Psalm 4 - The Source of Shalom	124
A Prayer for America	129
Lamentations 5	129
A Prayer for Revival.....	131
Habakkuk 3.....	131
Bibliography.....	142

Preface

Success in life is answered prayer. If a person receives what he asks for, he is a rich indeed.

Throughout my Christian life, I have been impressed with God's amazing answers to prayer, but I have also been bewildered at the times by His silence. There was a time when my little boy asked me for a bicycle for his birthday. Because I had just moved into a new city to take a new job and we had no cash. The purchase of a bike was out of the question. I prayed to the Lord. Oh, how I prayed. I shared the request with no one, absolutely, no one! On the day of my son's birthday, a Christian brother showed up at my door saying, "God laid it on my heart to come over today. Would your boy like to have a bicycle?" I was stunned!! I will never forget my son's joy, and mine, when we brought home a brand new bike.

But, silence! The thundering sounds of silence! What does it all mean? Is God testing us or is there something in our life that is hindering our prayers? Because I want to be successful in prayer, I spent time plowing through the Scriptures in search of answers on how to pray better. This work is the result of what God has been teaching me on prayer. It was a series of sermons given in 2002 that turned into an e-book.

My prayer is that as a result of the study, prayer will put power in your life!

Brooky Stockton, pastor



Power in Prayer



This series of sermons is about how prayer puts power in one's life, but in truth, there is no power in prayer. There is only power in the true God of the Bible.

Psalm 62: 11 God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power *belongeth* unto God.

But, prayer is one means of tapping into that power . . . not for power's sake, but to reap the benefits of being in a covenant relationship with Him.

Therefore, "**Lord, teach me to pray**"

Faith Puts Power in Your Prayers

Mark 9:23-24

"If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth"- Jesus



You can have more power in prayer by taking prayer seriously and adding faith to your prayers

FAITH IN THE VALLEY

One of the big keys to prayer is faith. Believing God above your feelings and the fray of criticism against true religion is an absolute necessity if you are to have an effective prayer life.

Have you ever heard the lyric, "I could have danced all night"? What a night! Peter, James, and John were privileged to witness the appearance of Moses and Elijah and the spectacular transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 9:1). It was truly a mountain top experience. There is no high like being with the Most High.

But, Jesus led his three theology students off the mountain and into the dust, grit, and heat of the valley. Nothing could be more sharply contrasted than life on the mountain than life in the valley. On the mountain they saw the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in all his splendor. In the valley they saw the degradation of man in all his depravity.

A professor once told me, "You don't plant corn on a mountain top. You plant corn in the valley."

God did not intend for us to live out our faith in neat, orderly monasteries, but to live out our lives among the messy, miserable problems of the masses. He did not intend for us to possess a polished unused sword but to go to war with a nicked and gouged sword. Our faith needs to be able to survive amidst the perplexing problems of unbelieving people.

If you will apply one lesson from this story about perplexing PROBLEMS IN THE VALLEY, it will put power in your life.

ARGUMENTS IN THE VALLEY

Mark 9:14 And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them.

When Jesus and his three students arrived, they found the scribes arguing with the other nine disciples. The scribes were a bunch of embittered, arrogant, religious lawyers that seemed compelled to argue and debate with Jesus. They were trying to “set them straight” about the Bible. And, it will be no different for you and me. There always seems to be an abundance of arrogant, lawyer types that are compelled to force their pluralistic worldview on the believer (Mark 9:14).

A surgeon, an architect and a lawyer were having a heated barroom discussion concerning which of their professions is actually the oldest profession. The surgeon said: "Surgery is the oldest profession. God took a rib from Adam to create Eve and you can't go back further than that." The architect spoke: "Hold on! God was the first architect when he created the world out of chaos in 7 days, and you can't go back any further than THAT!" The lawyer puffed his cigar and declared: "Gentlemen, Gentlemen...who do you think created the CHAOS?"

Jesus confronted these lawyers and asked, “What are you discussing with them?” But, before he could get a reply from the scribes, a man in the crowd shouted out the answer.

DEMONS IN THE VALLEY

17 "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth, and stiffens out. And I told your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it" (Mark 9:17-18).

The term “spirit” can be translated, “dumb spirit” (alalov) = unable to speak.

The distressed father poured out the pain in his life. Apparently, demon possession caused his son to be mute. The demons would seize him and slam him to the ground like an invisible, WWF wrestler. On the ground the boy would stiffen, shake uncontrollably, and foam at the mouth while grinding his teeth in a horrid contorted state.

While this appears similar to epilepsy, the text says the boy’s condition was due to an evil spirit. It is important to recognize that demons are real and that Satan is real. Their aim is to mislead, confuse, enslave, maim, and destroy happiness among mankind. In a world that is inebriated with the scientific, it would be a mistake to deny

the influence of evil spirits and attribute everything to natural phenomenon. Satan is a liar and a murderer who seeks to mislead and mess up the lives of men and women.

Even while Jesus was carrying on a conversation with the man, the evil spirit gripped the boy and threw him into convulsions. What a pitiful sight: head shaking, eyes rolled back into his eye sockets, spit and saliva and blood drooling out of the boy's mouth, teeth grinding, the body contorted, limbs stiff as frozen beef, and wallowing in the dust and dirt!

Have you ever seen an evil spirit? One day in a Baptist church in Alabama, Satan appeared on stage hissing and spitting out invectives against the congregation. The pastor disappeared behind the stage, and everybody raced to the exits except one man. As the foul odors of his presence filled the auditorium, Satan asked the solitary man if he was afraid of him. He replied, "Nope!" "Why not?" Satan inquired. The man leaning back in his chair with his arms crossed replied, "For 25 years, I've been married to your sister."

We may never see Satan, but the Bible informs us that the genesis of inexplicable evil is often due to the Prince of the Power of the Air.

POWERLESSNESS IN THE VALLEY

9:17-18 And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.

What a stunning statement, "I told your disciples to cast him out, and they could not." Though Jesus trained the nine, this problem appeared to be too big, too nasty, too human, and too out of the ordinary. No one could solve the perplexing human problem! Not the father, not the nine disciples, and not the scribes.

How haunting are the words, "they could not." Perhaps this was the greatest problem in the valley – powerlessness among God's people. I don't know about you but these visible, tangible, sweaty, nasty people-problems seem to swamp my little ship of faith with waves of doubt. As long as I'm safely docked in my church harbor (my mountaintop), my faith is bold and brassy. But when I have to enter the sea of conflict, the winds of fear and unbelief blow my soul off course.

UNBELIEF IN THE VALLEY

9:19 He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.

Jesus targeted the heart of the problem, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you?"

Unbelief has a source - a "faithless (a-pistos) generation;" that is, doubt dominates humanity. For this reason John said, "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." He did not say that faith produces the victory, but that the presence of faith is a victory.

Unbelief--that wretched arrow that pierces my little bubbles of faith.

What is it about us that we can believe in Jesus, believe in His resurrection, believe that He will come again, but the minute we face an ugly, salivating problem, sharp needles of unbelief pops our balloons of optimism? Maybe this is why faith is so esteemed in heaven. We are creatures that find it easier to walk by sight and not by faith.

JESUS IN THE VALLEY

9:19 He answereth . . . bring him unto me.

There is hope in the valley because Jesus was there

Jesus said, "Bring him to me!"

Things got worse before they got better. As soon as the spirit saw Jesus, the spirit seized the boy with his raw, brute power and delivered his enforcement. Slamming him to the ground the boy began to wet his pants, salivate, and shake like a human vibrator. Jesus inquired about the boy's state. We discover the possessed was afflicted with his condition from the time he was a youth. If there were any bubbles of hope left in the disciples, the father's answer must have popped them all: "of a child." This visible, nasty problem was deep-rooted and long standing.

HOPE IN THE VALLEY

9:23-24 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

"If thou canst believe" — The better MSS. omit the *first* word "believe" (Ellicott).

Reaching deep down into his pocket for a penny's worth of faith, the father invested all that he had in Jesus: "If you can do anything, take pity on us." The "if

clause" is a first class conditional in Greek and is assumed true. There is no doubt the needy father was fighting spiritual poverty, but he came up with a cent of hope.

Jesus repeated his words, "If you can?" And then, Jesus injected the dejected with steroids of certainty: "All things are possible to him who believes."

"Very much is promised to our believing. If thou canst believe, it is possible that thy hard heart may be softened, thy spiritual diseases may be cured; and, weak as thou art, thou mayest be able to hold out to the end."
(Matthew Henry)

"if thou canst believe; that is the hinge upon which all must turn"
(Cambridge).

"Jesus gives him back his doubts. The father said, 'If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us.' Christ's answer, according to the true reading, is not as it stands in our Authorized Version, 'If thou canst believe'-throwing, as it were, the responsibility on the man-but it is a quotation of the father's own word, 'If Thou canst,'" (MacLaren)

" 'Say not, If Thou canst. That is certain. All things are possible to thee' {not to do, but to get} 'if'-which is the only 'if' in the case-'thou believest."
(MacLaren)

"That majestic word is like the blow of steel upon flint; it strikes a little spark of faith which lights up the soul and turns the smoky pillar of doubt into clear flame of confidence. 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.'
(MacLaren).

"with tears" - "The better MSS. omit "with tears." (Ellicott)

Apparently, Jesus was giving the man a blank check where it is impossible to overdraw its account in God's bank.

A traveler crossed a frozen stream

In trembling one day;

Later a teamster drove across,

And whistled all the way.

Great faith and little faith alike

Were granted safe convoy;
One had the pangs of needless fear,
The other all the joy. (Source unknown)

Ya gotta love this dad! Jesus' words produced a bull market run in the father's faith. He let out a wet war whoop, "I believe," interpreted as "I trust you," and bet all his money on Jesus. Honest and transparent, he then confessed his struggle against the bone-crushing strength of doubt, "But, help Thou my unbelief."

With faith invested, Jesus declared a holy jihad against the demon from hell. Dropping a power bomb on Jake the Snake, Jesus' power lifted the spirit and threw him out of the ring resulting in a fatal fall. With the authority of an executioner, Jesus commanded the spirit to "never enter him again." The scene was a sweaty, terrifying affair. After the boy was thrown into convulsions, he was lying pale-still in the dust. Some in the crowd thought, "He is dead."

Spurgeon preached on this text: "Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth" (Judges 6:6). Where lies the secret strength of faith? It lies in the food it feeds on.

Faith and unbelief can be found growing in the same field. Note the birth of faith.

"In its infancy, faith may and does coexist with much unfaith and doubt. The same state of mind, looked at from its two opposite ends, as it were, may be designated faith or unbelief . . . through life there will always be the presence in us, more or less, of these two elements." (MacLaren).

"There follows from that thought this practical lesson, that the discovery of much unbelief should never make a man doubt the reality or genuineness of his little faith . . . We are all apt to write needlessly bitter things against ourselves when we get a glimpse of the incompleteness of our Christian life and character. . . "

Every stage of life has its problems, and the remedy begins with faith. Beware of being a grey-headed baby. What is important here is not the maturity of our faith but the growth and progress of our faith.

"God rewardeth weak faith where it is attended with a sincere desire of increase." (Poole)

" . . . the main thing is not the maturity, but the progressive character, of

faith . . . You do not expect the infant to have adult limbs, but you do expect it to grow. True, faith at its beginning may be like a grain of mustard seed, but if the grain of mustard seed be alive it will grow to a great tree, where all the fowls of the air can lodge in the branches" (MacLaren).

"Lord, I believe" - "I believe - I have faith. I do put confidence in thee, though I know that my faith is not as strong as it should be." (Barnes)

The man did not deny he struggled with doubt. In acknowledging his bout with doubt, and it only strengthened his faith.

"Lord, help thou my unbelief" can mean (1) that the Lord would remove his black cloud of doubt, or (2) that God would strengthen his faith. The idea seems to be the man did not want to be identified with the "unbelieving generation." Though he recognized doubt at work, He asked the Lord to fill in the gaps, to supply what was deficient, and to give him the faith he needed to see his son healed.

""Supply thou the defects of my faith. Give me strength and grace to put "entire" confidence in thee . . . Give me strength and grace to put "entire" confidence in thee . . . Everyone who comes to the Saviour for help has need of offering this prayer." (Barnes)

PRAYER IN THE VALLEY

9:28-29 And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer.

There is a "kind" of evil (demonic) that is difficult for even the best of pastors to solve. Difficult problems call for self-denial and fervency in seeking the Lord's remedy.

"The disciples must not think to do their work always with the same ease; some services call for more than ordinary pains." (Matthew Henry)

Our Lord did **not** say that casting out demons was impossible for Christians, but such work required additional prayer and devotion.

Mystified, the young theology students approached Jesus wanting to know why they could not deliver the boy from the toilet-faced spirit. Jesus' answer was stunning: "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer!" Interestingly, Jesus did not say, "You do not have enough faith."

Some versions have the phrase, “but by prayer and fasting.” The word, fasting, is not in the original text. It was not fasting the disciples lacked, but prayer. Apparently, the whole garbled scene: the dispute, the astonished crowd, and episode of epileptic seizures was due to the disciples’ failure to seriously pray and to use the hammer lock of faith to pain the demon into submission. Powerlessness was the result of prayerlessness.

There is a major question to answer here. Is not our powerlessness to defeat Satan and to break ourselves loose from his strangling holds due to a lack of prayer?

Truth be known, prayer meetings are the poorest attended meetings of the church. We are bored with prayer. We are tired of prayer. We really do not believe in prayer. We would rather work than pray; party than pray; watch T.V. than pray. Prayer is hard. Do we really think that effective preaching is inherent in the preacher? Do we really think that initiating a new program will solve our service needs? Do we really think that throwing money at a problem will unravel the tangled knots in our lives? Do we think that going through the motions of visitation will save souls? John Wesley said, “God will do nothing apart from prayer in the realm of history . . . God does nothing but in answer to prayer.”

We can do much after we have prayed, but we can do nothing before we have prayed.

“Prayers,” said E. M. Bounds, “are deathless. They are our capital stock in heaven.”

Prayer brings life. Strong saints are strong knockers. In prayer we acknowledge our creature hood and our dependence on God. Little prayer is the enemy of much prayer because it touches the conscience without touching the throne.

A pastoral friend of mine received news that a young Christian girl in his flock had given up the faith. He and another Christian went over to her apartment in an attempt to encourage her. But, she was hell-bound to go her own way and was determined to party till the cows came home. Instinctively, this brother fell to his knees in the doorway of her apartment when a carload of boys arrived to take her out. She literally had to step over his body to get through the door, down the sidewalk, and into the back seat of the car. This pastor continued to pray. Interestingly, as the lusty men and women drove to their party, the driver turned on the radio tuned to a Christian radio station playing the song, “There is Power in the Blood.” For an unknown reason, the backsliding woman was pierced to the core and ordered the driver to take her back

to her apartment. They argued with her, but she prevailed. They drove her home. When she arrived, this Christian and her roommates were still praying.

I don't know if prayer will always produce such dramatic results, but I can say, without prayer, we will see less results.

It is always more fun to party all night than to pray all night. If you are going to confront the perplexing problems in the valley, more prayer is the means of putting power into your life.

CHURCH SIGNS

Running low on faith? Stop in for a fill-up."

"Fight truth decay-study the Bible daily."

"People are like tea bags-You can have to put them in hot water before you know how strong they are."

Teach Us To Pray, I

Luke 11:1

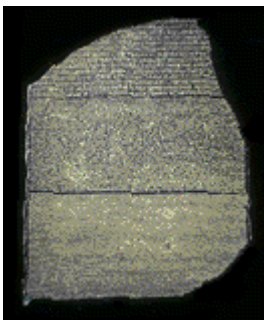
"And it came about that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples."

 You can You can open the mystery of prayer by using the keys Jesus gave His disciples. The first of which is to recognize You can have much need to learn how to pray.

Two men were talking together about religion. The first challenged the second, "If you are so religious, let me hear you say the Lord's prayer. I'll bet you ten bucks you can't say it." The second replied, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. And if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." The first pulled out his wallet and took out a ten dollar bill, muttering, "I didn't think you could do it."

In our study on prayer, we come to what is called "The Lord's Prayer." In truth, it is the "Disciple's Prayer" given in answer to their prayer, "Lord, teach us to pray."

The disciples sensed in Jesus' praying a depth, a mystery, and a richness in His relationship to the Father. And, the disciples yearned for that relationship. If You can have sensed there is more to prayer than You can have yet experienced, this lesson is for you.



For centuries the mysteries of the pyramids and their ancient messages were locked in time. In 1799, Napoleon's troops discovered a stone in lower Egypt near the town of Rosetta with inscriptions on it that became the key that unlocked the mysteries of Egyptian hieroglyphics. It is called the Rosetta Stone, and it eventually made its way into the British Museum in London where it resides today. It is a slab of black basalt dating from 196 BC. inscribed by the ancient Egyptians with a royal decree praising their king Ptolemy V. The inscription is written on the stone three times, once in hieroglyphic, once in demotic, and once in Greek. Thomas Young, a British physicist, and Jean Francois Champollion, a French Egyptologist, collaborated to decipher the hieroglyphic and

demotic texts by comparing them with the known Greek text. From this meager starting point a generation of Egyptologists eventually managed to read most everything that remains of the Egyptians' ancient writings. The Lord's prayer is the Rosetta Stone that unlocks the great mysteries of prayer.

PASSION

What is needed among Christians is not ability, but teachability, not power, but a passion for prayer. Most of us are fair weather Christians and we only pray when the storms of life threaten our comfortable life styles. We know little about how to pray and err when we assume that just because a person attends church, he knows something about prayer. The prayer meeting is generally the poorest attended meeting in the church. We need an explosion of people crying, "Lord, teach us to pray." Passion for prayer is the instrument that triggers the avalanche of answered prayer. C.S. Lewis said he waked each morning with the hopes and dreams of each day rushing his soul like wild animals. His first duty was to push them all back and to pray.

Even clergy know little about prayer. Most seminary education is theological rather than spiritual. Seminaries seek to impart correct conceptions about God. Preachers learn the outlines of the books of the Bible, the great theological issues of the ages, and how to preach. But, they have never taken a course under a master of prayer.

Unfortunately, there are few schools on the art of prayer. Furthermore, the life of a clergyman is not one that is conducive to prayer. He is expected to visit the flock and give wham bam killer messages each Sunday. If truth be known, even the preacher is expected to be a man of the world — a teaching, visiting, preaching, counseling, financial, organizational T.V./radio wizard who can charm snakes and chase tigers away.

While the preacher is expected to have the humor of Bob Hope, the brains of Albert Einstein, and the good looks of a James Bond, he is seldom expected to be a man of prayer.

E.M. Bounds confirms this observation,

"The pulpit of this day is weak in praying. The pride of learning is against the dependent humility of prayer. Prayer in the pulpit is too often only official — a performance for the routine of service."

Edward Payson said,

"Prayer is the first thing, the second thing, the third thing necessary to

minister. Pray, then, my dear brother, pray, pray, pray." (Preacher and Prayer, E.M. Bounds, 1907, p. 32).

There is a need among the clergy and congregation alike to enter into the disciplines of prayer. But, to exhort men to pray is not enough unless they are offered serious instruction about how to pray. And, to learn how to pray, men must possess a passion for prayer.

Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman wrote to a friend about an experience he had with Praying Hyde's influence on him. Unsuccessful in a series of meetings, Chapman learned that Praying Hyde was in town and asked him to pray for him. Hyde came to his room and dropped on his knees. Five minutes of silence went by before Hyde uttered, "Oh, God." Another five minutes went by and Chapman heard the most genuine, sincere petition he had ever heard. That night the meeting hall was packed and over fifty souls came forward to receive Christ as their Savior. This is passion.

STUDY HOW JESUS PRAYED

It was Jesus who prayed first. There can be no doubt that part of His prayer was dedicated to the welfare of His disciples. The disciples' petition to teach them to pray was simply a positive response to His initiative in prayer.

When we seek God, we hope that God will respond to our seeking. However, it is not man who takes the initiative in the act of praying, but God Who takes the initiative in the action of prayer.

It was God Who commanded, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know." (Jeremiah 33:3).

It was God Who pleaded, "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD" (Isaiah 1:18). "He summons the heavens and the earth," declared the psalmist (50:4).

Every act of praying is simply a response to God's prior action. Theologians call this, "the doctrine of prevenience." The heart of the gospel is not that the sinner loves God, but that God loves the sinner. We love Him because He first loved us.

The mighty action of prayer is built on the foundation of God's relentless search for lost men. Prayer is not man's search for God, but a man's submission to the staggering pursuit of God's love for him.

We must be humble or stumble. The smallest desire to pray does not come from us, but from God stirring our hearts to seek Him. This knowledge alone will keep us from being devoured by the lion of spiritual pride. Pride hinders prayer and is about as welcome in heaven as an Arab in a synagogue. When we realize that prayer is not our mighty initiative to pursue God, but simply a response to His mighty love, we are in a position to be heard: "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). The doctrine of prevenience helps us know, that even in our praying, God is the first cause.

PRAY TO THE TRUE GOD OF THE BIBLE

To Whom do we present our prayers? Backsliding Israel prayed to idols. The Pharisee in the temple prayed "to himself" (Luke 18:11). The Samaritans worship "that which they do not know," declared Jesus (John 4:22). Greeks prayed to Zeus or Apollo or Aphrodite. Moslems pray to the false deity, "Allah." New Agers pray to an impersonal "Force." Indians pray to the "Great Spirit." Hindus pray to everything--rats and cows and trees because they are pantheists who believe that all of nature is part of god. Mormons pray to a god with a physical body and believe that as god once was, we are, and as god is, we shall become. Catholics pray to Mary. But, the Lord's instructions about prayer help us to have presentable prayers.

The first word in the Lord's prayer is the word, "Father" (Πάτερ), not "our." The word "our" (ἡμῶν) is the second word used in Matthew 6:9. The title, "Father," is in the emphatic position signifying the importance of the term.

The world addresses the Inexplicable as "God." The Jews addressed God as "the Creator," or "Lord God Almighty," or "Adonai" or "YHWH." But, it is Jesus who introduces God to us as the Father. During the sunrise of Jesus' consciousness, we hear the twelve-year old reply to his parents, "I must be in my Father's house" (Luke 2:49). At high noon He said, "I and my father are one" (John 10:31). And, during sunset in Jesus' life He prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Jesus uses this title approximately a hundred times in John's gospel. He was unwearied with communion whether arising early or staying up late to pray.

First, the title "Father" carries with it the idea of source and sustenance of life. He is our Father by virtue of His creation. To call God "Creator" is to assert a basic distinction between the Creator and the creature. This great Christian conviction advances the truth that God's existence is utterly independent of every other being, and that man's existence is utterly dependent on the Supreme Being. God has no need of us,

but we have a great need for Him. God does not change or grow, but man is always becoming. God is finished. Man is unfinished. God has no needs. Man has nothing but needs. God created all things; Man can create nothing. God is independent of His creation. Man is dependent on Him and His creation. God is eternal. Man is temporal. God is in heaven. Man is on earth.

It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves (Psalm 100:3).

Not only does man owe his existence to God, but his continued existence to God. The Greeks taught that man was immortal; that his spirit would ascend unmolested to take his place among the gods. The Bible teaches, however, that God alone has immortality, and for this reason alone, man needs God (1 Timothy 6:16). If there is any hope of life after death, it can only be found in relation to the One who alone has immortality. Only the eternal Creator can maintain temporal man. To wake up every day is a gift of life from the Creator.

True prayer, then, is when creatures depend upon their Creator. And, it is here men begin in prayer: a debtor, a dependent, a creature in need of relationship with God. And, it is this difference that gives us hope! Jesus put His disciples in contact with their Heavenly Father, their Creator.

Secondly, God is not only our Father by virtue of creation, but by virtue of redemption. Man's actual status is one of self-centeredness, "I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself" (Genesis 4:10). Four times Adam used the word, "I." Man is fallen. He is imprisoned within himself. He is trapped in the black hole of wretched subjectivism. On a California campus, there was a poster advertising an Eastern religion with a caption that read,

"You can go in and in and in,

And then you go in and in and in,

And after that you go in and in and in and in"

Man's problem is not IGNORANCE nor is his need EDUCATION. Man is lost. He has wholly refused to live under the terms set by His Creator—in thankful dependence and God-centeredness. It is a good thing that men do not have to pay taxes on what they think they are worth. Man is a slave to his own estimation of greatness. In the machinery of his own mind, he remains the "big wheel." Like a ball of twine, man is all wrapped up in himself. Man has become self-willed, self-centered, self-organized,

self-dependent. Men are into self-image, self-advancement, self-hypnosis, self-therapy. Man is so into self, there is even a magazine called, "Self."

Man has rejected God's plan for his life and presumed to substitute blind self-rule based upon his own, partial, distorted knowledge of his own frail goodness and selfish will. He even seeks to believe that he is god. So deeply has man fallen into self-centeredness that even after the disastrous centuries of bloodshed and misery, man still thinks that he can produce peace and tranquility by human legislation.

Oh, miserable man! What can deliver him from his inner prison? The answer lies in the gospel of Jesus Christ. "I declare unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached . . . Christ died for your sins . . . and rose again" (1 Corinthians 15:1-12). "For God the Father so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). The gospel saves men and delivers them from self-centeredness, and self-deceit. It takes their eyes off their belly button and focuses them on the historical events of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection as their hope for eternal life, immortality, and eternal happiness. It saves men from sin and releases men from the magnetic powers of self-centeredness. When a man confesses his sinnerhood and receives Christ as His Savior, he becomes a child of God (John 1:12, 13; Ephesians 5:1). He knows God, not only as his Creator, but His loving, redemptive Father. He is delivered from self-centeredness by taking his eyes off his temporal self and looking to the Christ of history for his eternal hope and earthly purpose.

In the Lord's prayer, the first word Jesus taught His disciples was, "Father." When a Christian prays, he takes his eyes off himself and off of his problems and looks to Another so wholly and totally different from himself. He takes his eyes off the temporal, and places them on the eternal; off the mortal, to the immortal; off of sin, and onto pure holiness.

In prayer, the Christian is delivered from self-centeredness by relinquishing his own stubborn sovereignty to rely upon the strength of the Only Sovereign. He is no longer the Sun in his own solar system, but is content to be a special planet whose life rotates around the Son. His new Gestalt is wonderfully organized around the will of the Father. When a Christian prays, he engages this relationship as a dependent child coming in joyful dependence and thankful obedience to his heavenly Father, the one Who gives and sustains his life. He knows that prayer is a privilege of the family. Because of being a member of God's house, the believer has a right to boldly approach God and present his petitions to His Heavenly Father.

A man cannot really pray, "Our Father" without longing in his heart for a relationship with his brothers and sisters in Christ. Terms like "our" or "us" or "to us" (plural in the Greek) remind us that we do not own the Father alone, but share the blessed kinship together with all who know Christ. We cannot possibly relate to God without relating to the family of God. A man who does not desire to pray or to have a relationship with the family of God cannot rightfully think of himself as a child of God.

In closing, we must not grow weary in prayer. Mrs. Hanover, the wife of a wealthy businessman had been praying for her unsaved husband when the telephone rang. Stunned, she dropped the phone shaking with unbelief. The news she received was so terrifying, that at that moment she stopped praying. Years went by before a young man named Roger entered Hanover Enterprises to see Mr. Hanover. The receptionist said it was impossible to see him, but that he could see his wife. Now president of the company, Mrs. Hanover asked, "You knew my husband?" "Yes, sort of . . ." the young man stuttered. "You see, I was just released from the army, and I was hitchhiking back home when a man in a brand new Cadillac pulled over. When I saw his beautiful suit and the new car, I lost all hope of getting a ride. But, he let me in and offered me a lift to the next town." Stumbling for words, Roger continued. "Ma'm, I'm a little embarrassed to say this, but I'm a Christian and while we were driving I shared with your husband about the joy Christ brought into my life and asked him if he would like to receive Christ as his Savior. He pulled the car over. I thought I was going to be ejected from the car. But, he bowed his head in prayer. Afterward, he said, 'This is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me.'" Mrs. Hanover interrupted, "What day was this?" Roger responded, "I'll never forget it. It was May 7th, the day I was released from the Army." At that moment Mrs. Hanover burst into tears. "Where is your husband," Roger queried. "He is dead. That was the day I received the telephone call that he had just been killed in car accident. He never made it home." Sobbing uncontrollably, Mrs. Hanover added, "That is the day I stopped living for God because I thought He had not kept His word" (Johnson, J. K. (1992). *Why Christians Sin*. pp 39-41).

In summary, the Lord's Prayer is the Rosetta Stone that provides the first of three keys to powerful, effective prayer. If You can have a passion for prayer, understand prevenience, and your presentment is to your Heavenly Father, you are inserting the keys that will unlock the mysteries and power of prayer.

Teach Us To Pray, II

Matthew 6:9

“Hallowed be thy name.”

In our study on prayer, we are studying “The Lord’s Prayer.” It is the Rosetta Stone that unlocks the mysteries of prayer. In it we find the keys to a deeper, more fulfilling prayer life.



You can have more power in prayer by making the honor of God’s name your first priority.

We now come to the imperatives:

“Hallowed be thy name.” (Matthew 6:9)

We have all seen children’s stories about Aladdin’s lamp where the genie pops out and grants three wishes. If you had three wishes, what would you wish for?

When I had young children and we were on vacation, I would hand the children five dollars each and tell them that they could spend the money on anything they wished. Each would buy something different: an ice cream cone, a toy soldier, a rubber ball, jewelry, or some other treasure. Each purchase revealed values.

In this prayer, Jesus is introducing us to the priorities of the Father. The first priority in prayer is the honor of God’s name. A name in the Bible is often more than a title. It reveals the attributes and character of the individual, and this is especially true with the name or titles of God (Exodus 34:5-7; Psalm 9:10). God has many titles, such as “Elohim,” or “Adonai,” or “Jehovah-Shalom,” but He only has one name. That Name is YHWH (Yahovah) which means, “I Am Who I Am” (Exodus 3:14).

The archaic term, “Hallowed” comes from the Greek word “holy” or “sanctify” (ἁγιασθήτω). It is an aorist imperative instructing us that His name and His honor should immediately become our first concern. Too often we are like toddlers demanding immediate gratification of our own lusts. All that is wrong with the world emerges from the neglect of God. When a Christian prays, “Hallowed be thy name,” he is praying that all that he thinks and says and does might stem from a heart organized around an ambition to exalt and glorify God. “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

It goes without saying that curse words or minced words should never be found upon our lips and that tattoos and idolatrous symbols should never be found upon our bodies.

Haddon Robinson has an old recipe for Rabbit Stew. On the recipe card the first instruction is, “First, catch the rabbit.” If you want to live accurately, first pray that you might catch an infectious passion to esteem Christ in all that you do and say.

 **You can have a more power in prayer by realizing the number one need among men – the need to acknowledge His rule over them.**

A REBEL'S PRAYER

**“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”
(Matthew 6:10).**

Our precious Lord taught us to pray, “Thy Kingdom Come.” It is part of the Lord’s Prayer a.k.a. the “Disciples’ Prayer.”

Positively, it is a plea that all men and all man’s institutions would surrender to His authority . . . to be ruled by God’s law; negatively, it is coup de’etat against godless authorities and de facto officials.

This is the rebel’s prayer—a revolutionary’s cry against the immorality of this age and the promotion of wickedness by men in rebellion against the Creator. This prayer is God’s permission to resist evil, to take the high road, and swim against the stream; it allows men to shout “No King, but King Jesus.” It is permission to adopt the motto “one nation under one God and one absolute law.”

It is a prayer against the belief that man is god; that government is god; that mans’ law or their constitutions are absolute.

It is a prayer against the status quo where ambitious men seek to advance the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. It is a prayer against abortion, oppression, homosexuality, pornography, and greed.

It is a prayer against secularism, atheism, humanism, socialism, Marxism and every other ism wherein secularists seek to build a city where man is the measure of all things.

It is a prayer against rulers in rebellion against “the LORD and His Anointed” — against governments who seek to enslave and control men through coercion, intimidation, and fear.

It is a prayer against governments hostile to the maxim that the Bible is the Source of all Law; and, it is a prayer against governments that break their own laws.

It is a prayer against unjust laws and legislators “who do mischief through law” by creating a system of man-made statutes and codes that enslave their citizenry [Ps. 94:20]; who seek to create a new world order through law; who promote alien laws that undermine the Ten Commandments and the virtues they advance: faithfulness, justice, and mercy.

It is a prayer against those who defraud others; against rulers that steal from the people through color of law; against unlawful taxation that transfers power from the family to the State.

If you are angry at godless politicians, this prayer is for you: “Lord, Thy kingdom Come.”



You can have more power in prayer realizing God wants to supply your needs and the needs of others.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

To the overweight American, this prayer seems almost irrelevant. Until we are forced by negative circumstances to depend on God for daily sustenance, this prayer may lack meaning.

The term bread is symbolic for all of man’s physical needs. It would include all that is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of life: water, food, clothes, bedding, shelter, rent, love, and general happiness. This prayer is not only a plea, but an affirmation. We are physical beings and our Heavenly Father desires that we look to Him for our physical needs.

The term “us” implies that our prayers should extend beyond ourselves and include intercessory prayer for the needs of others.

The verb “give” is an aorist imperative instructing us that we have a right to come before our Father and respectfully ask him to meet our physical needs. God, not government, is the source of our provision. We are to petition heaven for our needs, not

fill out forms for government handouts. God is glorified and we are satisfied when we bow in humble dependence on Him Who sustains all things. A critic said to a preacher, "You just live from hand to mouth." "Yes," replied the minister, "But, it is His hand, and my mouth."

God wants us to look to Him, not the government! With today's nanny state, looking to the government to provide us education, food stamps, jobs, and security is a wicked temptation that produces sick, weak Christians.

This text does not mean we are to pray and not work. Man is called to provide for his own family and those who do not do so are worse than infidels (1 Timothy 5:8). Man bears the onus of plowing, planting, and harvesting. But, no farmer can make the corn grow. God is sovereign over the blessings of harvest. Therefore, we look to him.

The minister also looks to God to provide for his needs, but the people of God are also called to support their pastor(s) as part of their duty to Christ. Many a minister has lived in destitution because the flock has muzzled the ox with treads out the corn (1 Corinthians 9:9)—canon case law related to the Eight Commandment, "Thou shall not steal." Depriving a minister of his due is a form of stealing. Possibly, individual deprivation may be individual families have deprived ministers of their financial support. This prayer is about "our" not "me" or "my."

The word "daily" has given Greek scholars a run for their money in that the word cannot be found frequently in Greek literature. Robertson concludes it means "upon" or "on" or "the next day's" bread—a prayer of the household servant responsible for keeping the storage bin full. The text appears to imply that we are to rely on God one day at a time. We need today's provisions today and tomorrow's provisions tomorrow. It is indeed a gift of grace to be content with God's provision today and trust God for tomorrow. It is one thing to have a hundred thousand dollars in the bank and say God is good, and it is quite another to have an empty bank account and say that God is good. Until you look into an empty flour barrel and pray, "Thank you Lord for what you are going to provide today," You can have not yet tested this prayer, "Give us today our daily bread." It is one thing to be fat and full and say, "God provides," and it is quite another to have an empty wallet and believe, "God will provide." There is nothing like having nothing to test your faith.

Can God provide day by day?

When my wife and I were married and just embarking on a career in the ministry, we decided not to rely on our own wisdom but to trust God completely for

our daily provision. We decided to test the promises of God. Honestly, I never dreamed anything could be so difficult and exhausting. I hope you don't mind if I share a few stories. The names are changed to protect people's privacy.

Influenced by the life and story of George Mueller, I decided not take a salary for teaching Bible at a Christian school. Though I don't think this was a wise decision today, it was instructive. It was the middle of the month and my family of five was running low on groceries, real low! It was Sunday, and all I had for the rest of the month was ten dollars. I mean all the money I had in the whole world was in my wallet. And, I had not given anything to the Lord. In a moment of time, I became a hilarious giver and put the ten dollars in the collection plate. And then it dawned on me what I had done. On Tuesday morning, my wife informed me before breakfast that we were completely out of food and milk and that she was going to feed our children their last meal- cereal and watered down powdered milk. My wife and I did not eat. I prayed. Oh, I prayed. I came home from work at noon to check the mailbox. In the mail was a check for 25 dollars, the sweetest 25 dollars I have ever seen in my entire life. What was interesting was how we received it. My mom had cleaned out some closets and threw out a bunch of old papers. Dad decided to go through the trash and see if she might have over looked something. Digging through the garbage, Dad found an envelope with a twenty-five dollar U.S. Treasury Bond inside that was given to me as a boy. Dad smiled and mailed me the check. That 25 dollars fed my family for two weeks.

A pastor friend of mine was a man who lived by faith. He was an unsalaried servant of Christ and knew too often the trauma of being penniless. The day before his daughter's birthday, he asked his six-year-old daughter what she wanted for her birthday. She answered, "Daddy, I want a cherry pie." My friend was so poor he made Tiny Tim's pet mouse look like an English Baron. Jim and his wife didn't have a dime in their purse or an apple in their cupboard. That evening, a Bible study group showed up at Jim's home for a Bible study and everyone brought a sack of groceries as a love offering. What amazed me was not that God provided so wonderfully, but that there was a pie mix and a can of cherries in one of those sacks. Over the years, I watched God graciously supply his needs. On many occasions I watched him sell his car to provide for daily necessities. In my opinion, it was a hard life, but he never complained.

I wish I could say that trusting God for daily bread was easy. Insecurity, fear, doubt, and jealousy were unwanted companions. The most difficult aspect of trusting God for daily necessities is living in a society that abounds in wealth and where human wisdom (and maybe Divine wisdom) rests in laying aside a substantial portion of one's income to invest in retirement programs. Let me

illustrate the emotional difficulty: One time a wealthy brother came into my office and asked for prayer. He was worried sick! He shared with me how his bank account had dropped under ten thousand dollars, and that he was facing the possibility of having to liquidate a portion of his (large) retirement fund. What he did not know and I could not share was that I had no retirement fund and that I just gotten off my knees praying for my own concerns because my bank account had just dropped under a hundred dollars. I prayed for the man. Today, he is a wealthy man, and I am still praying, "Lord, give me this day, my daily bread." It is the word "daily" that tests my faith and pummels my own soul. Maybe this is the reason why most ministers start off in small churches and migrate to larger churches. Seldom, do we see ministers of a large church accept an assignment to a smaller church.

LESSONS

During my own pilgrimage I've learned several things about trusting God for daily bread. First, the Father may ordain times of testing for His servants. If the Lord Jesus was led into the wilderness to experience forty days of hunger, we should not be surprised that God will lead some of us into periods where we have to trust God day-by-day.

On another occasion I was so destitute I felt like a penny asking for change. I was preaching through a series at a young church, and the church had not yet taken an offering for my services. I stayed up late that night preparing the sermon. Because I didn't have any money, I couldn't afford to buy gasoline for my car and I wasn't able to take my family to the church. To make matters worse, we had no food in the house. I walked to church and prayed that God would provide for my wife and three young children. After the Sunday morning meeting, a brother came up to me and slipped two dollars into my hand and said, "Thank you for your series of messages." On my three-mile walk home, I stopped off at the grocery store and bought some groceries. When I arrived home, my wife cried for joy. That Sunday night, I was leading another Bible study about two miles from my home. Again, I walked. After the study, another brother came up to me and placed two dollars in my hand. Why not ten or twenty or a hundred? Why only two dollars? I did not know. But, it was God's provision for my family for another day's meals. The next day as I was in prayer about our daily needs when a neighbor brought over a big, huge bowl of stew. It lasted for three meals. God never took the pressure off, but He continued to supply our needs one day at a time with a five-dollar check here and a two-dollar gift there. To be honest, this kind of life style wearied my soul. I prayed. I cried. I pleaded. And, I limped all the way through

this period. But, God provided. To this day, I look back at that time in my life with absolute awe at the grace and power of God to sustain us day by day.

Second, we must be careful about judging those who are going through difficulties. Our church was having trouble meeting its budget demands. Bob was a financial wizard and wanted to take me out to lunch to talk about the church and its financial struggles. In the course of the conversation, he began to criticize John, one of our staff members, and accused him of being financially inept, a poor financial manager, and a guy who always seemed to struggle financially. I listened graciously. Later that month our church received a handsome check that helped cover our short falls and helped get the church back on its feet financially. I was greatly relieved and very thankful. When I looked at the check, it was from John. He had emptied his I.R.A. to keep the church afloat. Today, John is still poor and still serving the Lord. Bob made his million and is now retired.

Third, going through the winepress of want is a fermenting experience. Jay was a talented, beloved brother. But, for some reason, he could not land a good job. He was in and out of work for years. It was a crushing, wrangling experience for him—and us. I hurt for the man and would pray for him often. During those years we used to attend a weekly prayer meeting together. Jay was always there. Week after week he would pull out his list and begin to cry and weep and plead with God in prayer for those on his register. His sincere, genuine prayers pierced my own heart. Who were those on his tear-soaked list? They were the names of those saints who were out of work. Jay never forgot the “us” in, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

In summary, the Lord’s Prayer is the Rosetta Stone that provides the second of three powerful keys to effective prayer. If you will pray with the right priorities and surrender yourself to God, and trust Him to provide for you, you will be able to unlock the mysteries and power of prayer in your daily life.

Teach Us To Pray, III

Matthew 6:12

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

In our study on prayer, we are studying “The Lord’s Prayer.” It is the Rosetta Stone that unlocks the mysteries of prayer. In it we find the keys to a deeper, more effective prayer life.

Today, we will investigate two more keys.



You can have more power in prayer by forgiving other and obtaining personal forgiveness

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

The topic of forgiveness is an explosive term in Christian circles.

The term “debts,” is a synonym for the word, “sin.” A debt occurs when someone deprived you of a right or valuable asset.

The word “forgive” (aphiemi) means, “to send away,” “to let go,” or “to divorce. The verb “also have forgiven” is a disputed tense. In some manuscripts it is a present tense, and in others it is an aorist. Possibly, the Aramaic form was a perfect. The weight of the evidence suggest, however, the aorist tense would be less mechanical and, therefore, the proper tense (Metzger). The aorist assumes completed action; i.e. our request for forgiveness is predicated on the presumption that we have already forgiven those who sinned against us.

DEBT

In broaching the subject of forgiveness, Jesus identifies a major human need among mankind. Because we have neglected Him, dishonored His laws, we are deeply in debt. We need forgiveness so we can rejoice in Him.

FORGIVENESS

First, sins are not cleansed by prayer, but by blood. Only by faith in the doing and dying of Jesus can a person obtain eternal forgiveness. If prayer alone could obtain forgiveness, there would have been no reason for the Father to send His Son to the

cross. Forgiveness rests on the foundation of redemption (Hebrews 9:7, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25; 10:19).

Second, the Lord is addressing his disciples, not the world. The world cannot obtain forgiveness by prayer. The sinner who wants to obtain eternal forgiveness must repent, trust Christ, and throw himself on the mercies of the cross (Acts 20:21). Praying for forgiveness is something only Christians can do.

When a Christian sins, his eternal standing and eternal inheritance is **not** in jeopardy. Rather, his fellowship with the Father is in jeopardy. Sin does not disrupt one's standing in the family, it disrupts communion in the family (Isaiah 59:2). This is what Jesus taught His disciples at the Lord's Supper, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet." The term, "bath" symbolizes salvation, and the term, "wash" symbolizes sanctification. We can pray till we are blue in the face for our physical needs to be met, but if we will not judge sin, our prayer will go unanswered. For this reason, prayer becomes a means of purging sin in our lives in order that nothing may hinder our fellowship with God and man "Search me, O God, and see if there be in wicked way within me" (Psalm 139:23).

Third, confession is the means of purging sin from our lives (1 John 1:9). Confession follows inspection and it implies at least three actions: (a) Confession demands honesty about our sins and acknowledgement of them to God. God exhorts us to identify sin in our lives and to call an Ace an Ace, a Spade a Spade, and a sin a sin; that is, to be specific. It is one thing to pray, "God forgive me for my sins," and quite another to pray, "God forgive me for covetousness." (b) Confession may involve repentance and restitution. When our sins affect others, we need to acknowledge to the ones we injured that their pain is due to our sin. The hardest words to say are, "I was wrong." Furthermore, we may need to do what we can to repair the damage done. For example, Joe was a Christian and he borrowed Mike's truck and because he was careless, put a nasty dent in the tail end. Joe confessed his carelessness to Mike. Mike was upset not only because his beautiful truck was damaged, but because he had \$500 deductible on his insurance. Joe, however, promised to pay the deductible and over the course of a few months was able to pay off that debt. Now this is the proper way to deal with sin; (c) once sin is confessed, faith must be activated to lay hold of the joy of forgiveness. Sin need not be confessed again, and again, and again. Once will do.

Fourth, in praying for our own release from sin's debt, we need to release others from their debt to us. The subordinate conjunction "as" (ὡς) is comparing God's

measure of forgiveness to the measure we forgive others. In other words, God's forgiveness is predicated on the presumption that we have granted forgiveness to those who seek it from us.

Some errantly think that forgiveness must be automatic – that if someone slanders you name in hope of destroying your reputation your first response should be forgiveness; or, if someone rapes your daughter, your first response should be to forgive the rapists; or, if some nut case walks into the church and starts killing people that the first response of the mourning congregation needs to be forgiveness. What? No time to mourn or grieve or come to grips with the tragedy?

Jesus is not teaching automatic forgiveness or “quicky-forgiveness.” Rather, He is teaching the true victim of the need to forgive the miscreant that knows he's wrong and seeks your forgiveness. We can be ready to forgive, but release of debt is only available to those who ask for it (Luke 17:3). Automatic forgiveness for serious matters can be a flight from responsibility to courageously confront those who sin against us. The predator has a greater need than the victim. Confront them that they may grow in Christ. If they admit wrong and ask for forgiveness. Forgive them and let go of the power to control them.



Praying for personal protection from sin that defiles and disqualifies a man for holy service is a necessity for believers.

“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

The word “temptation” is the Greek word *peirasmos*. It can be translated, “test” or “trials” or “temptation.” Jesus informs us that God is involved in the initiation of difficulties that enter our lives. If the Spirit led Jesus in the wilderness to be tested, apparently we can be led into certain types of testing. Since God does not tempt us with evil (James 1:12ff), we should assume the “temptation” here has to do with various sorts of trials—even trials that may provoke evil. The passage, however, does not say, “Tempt us not.” God does not tempt men with evil.

There is a warning here: The subjunctive verb “lead” has a negative in front of it. The imperative begs God **not** to do something. There are trials that can break us, and reveal the worst about us. Evil is all around us, even within us. We need to pray that God will never allow the kind of trial that will expose our deepest sins. Severe testing can shame even the best among us. I have no doubt there is a test that could cause me to deny Christ. When I hear of certain car accidents, severe illnesses, and the financial disasters, I wonder how in the world do people hold up. I pray, however, the kind of

trial that might reveal the worst about me may never come into my life or the life of my church. At best we are delicate, fragile beings. It doesn't take much to break a man or a community of God's people. This prayer, therefore, is for humble men—men who know they are weak—men who fear being overcome by evil.

There is encouragement here: God is involved in our testing. He is sovereign, and nothing can touch our lives without His permission. He appoints our trials. This world is not out of control. Our lives are not the product of unpredictable forces. Think of it! The difficulties that you are going through now are appointed for your good and His glory. Joseph could boldly say to his brothers, "Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Genesis 45:8). Trials may frustrate us, but they may also perfect us. Trials can become a spiritual opportunity to test the promises of God. A weakness toward alcohol addiction can result in a testimony to the power of God. A financial strait can result in a testimony to provision of God. A devastating illness can result in a testimony to God's grace.

The phrase, "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen," is a beautiful doxology, but it is not in the earliest manuscripts. Old Latin simply had, "Thine is the power for ever and ever." The late manuscripts included the lectionary Trinitarian ascription, and some insert, "of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Because the Lord's Prayer is such a powerful key to unlocking the mysteries of prayer, the church inserted this liturgical inscription Lord's Prayer as a dogmatic reminder of the Trinitarian God believers serve. Because there was a need to standardize the Lord's Prayer so it could be read in unison, smooth readings were developed. Eventually, the Trinitarian ascription found its way into some late manuscripts. Due to the science of textual criticism, we know this was not part of the original prayer. However, there is biblical basis for using the doxology and a powerful reason for keeping it in the liturgy. Possibly, the phrase came from 1 Chronicles 29:11.



Praying for strength to forgive others, to let go of the power of revenge, and to pray that God would forgive you of sins that offend His holiness.

"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

Interestingly, out of all the keys given by Jesus in this prayer, He only chose to give a postscript on the subject of forgiveness. Jesus knew that his disciples would have difficulty with this application.

First, we need to understand that religious people, including Christians, have an amazing ability to separate their relationship with their fellow man from their relationship with God. We even have a doctrine called, "Separation of Church and State." It seems to be quite possible to live for God on Sunday and to live for the Devil on Monday through Saturday; to praise God in church and to curse men at work. Jesus, however, never allowed his disciples to make a complete bifurcation between their relationship to God and man. He instructed his disciples to leave their gift at the altar and to get things right with their brother (Matthew 5:23ff). He taught them "to bless" and not "to curse" (Luke 6:28). James rebuked his congregation for the hypocrisy of cursing men made in the image of God (James 3:9). Here, Jesus instructed His followers to forgive others before they sought forgiveness from God.

Second, forgiving others of their few, tiny sins against us ought to be easy since God has forgiven us of our many, enormous sins against Him. A person who has a giant problem in regards to forgiving others has a pigmy size view of his own sins and God's forgiveness toward him. And, this is the problem that Jesus is addressing here. How can a person expect God to forgive him, if he does not forgive others?

Furthermore, we need to reconsider the petition, "Lead us not into temptation . . ." Since God leads us into testing, we need to reflect on the fact that then even the rasping difficulties brought into our life by others are ordained of God. Perhaps, the deep pain we feel is designed for us to reflect on the pain that we have caused God by our own neglect and rebellion against Him.

Third, we need to define forgiveness correctly. The word "forgive" as indicated earlier means, "to send away." When we forgive others we must "send away" the deed and the pain it caused. This is the difficult part. For some, it is easy to forgive the deed but hard to forgive the lingering hurt. Unforgiving people tend to use hurt to control those who offended them. Anger and criticism are two well-refined tools victims use to control their offenders. But, this is not what Christ calls us to do. The sins of others against us must be "sent away," "divorced," and "released." We must free the offender from our anger and set them free to become what God has called them to be.

Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between petty, emotional hurts swirling around in the hearts and heads of those who have been instructed by

psychological teachers and real “offenses” as addressed in Scripture. The former presumes rights God has not granted. The latter involves legitimate rights bestowed by God. The Biblical word for “offense” is “skandalizo” (Matthew 17:26; 18:6, 8, 9) which involves personal injury or fraud, that is, a violation of common law. The term literally means, “to bait with a hook.” Terms like “hurt,” “pain,” are closely associated with psychotherapy where supposed victims are encouraged to explore the “abused inner child” for blame points. The touchy-feely world of supposed psychological abuse does not rise to the same level of concern as a scandal. In other words, beware of being manipulated by the current culture of victimization at work in the church.

Fourth, we need to forgive people who know they have offended us and who seek forgiveness. In Luke 17:3, Jesus predicated the bestowal of forgiveness upon the offender’s willingness to come and confess his wrongdoing. Based on this Scripture, I understand that forgiveness is not something that is automatic, but something that must be granted only after sin has been fully confessed. If grounded on the fact of repentance, forgiveness must be extended.

While automatic forgiveness is not a Scriptural doctrine, neither is clinging to bitterness (Hebrews 12:15). In my own mind, I’ve concluded that we need to work through offenses and come to a place before God that we are ready to forgive when and if the offender meets the criteria of repentance.

Sometimes, we need to let justice take its course. For example, I was working with a man and a woman hoping to achieve reconciliation. She was working through forgiveness and he was working through integrity. One day, the man really hurt his wife. I confronted him about it. Instead of repenting, he went home cut up all her clothes with scissors, flattened her car tires, and broke her car windows. They redneck had a severe problem. The issue was no longer forgiveness, but justice. The courts had to become involved and the man had to be punished for his crime. Reconciliation was impossible because he would not repent.

Furthermore, if we have sinned and injured someone by what we have done or said, it is important that we follow God’s steps to restoration.

Step One: When we injure someone by our sin, it is our responsibility to go to that person and listen to the hurt and the pain we caused. This is very difficult. We are prone to engage in shallow repentance, shallow confessions, and shallow forgiveness. Listening to the pain we cause is one way we can truly repent and become an agent of healing to the injured party (Matthew 5:23-25; 7:1-3).

Step Two: Having listened, we should respond something like this, “Thank you for sharing your pain with me. I promise to carefully weigh what you say.” And, then, weigh carefully what they say!

Step Three: Search your heart and ask forgiveness for the things that God has convicted you about while you were “carefully weighing” what they said. Admit your fault by saying, “I was wrong when . . .”

Step Four: Ask if there is anything else you can do to relieve the stress your sin has caused in their life.

In Summary, an effective prayer life involves purging ourselves of sin, seeking His protection, and pardoning others.

Steve and Sarah are a wonderful couple who are very likeable, but they had a blended family with all the typical problems. The crisis among their children separated them. They were headed for a divorce when they called me on the phone. They were as opposite as night and day. She was the sensitive rose-peddle, feeler type, and he was the determined bulldozer type. They were hours away from committing to a divorce, when I intervened. God was gracious. We listed the issues separating them, and then talked about them. Talking was not easy because each wanted to interrupt the other. We established some rules: He talks, she listens; She talks, he listens. For three days, they talked, listened; listened, then talked. The sunrise of hope dawned on the second day. Confessions were made, forgiveness bestowed. By the third day, they worked out a plan to resolve the issues separating them. Confession and forgiveness work, when people have integrity.

In Conclusion, the Lord’s Prayer is the Rosetta Stone that provides the keys to effective prayer. If you will enter the prayer closet with these keys, you will begin to unlock the hidden powers of prayer in your life.

Assurance of Answered Prayer

The Prayer Notices of Jesus

Matthew 7:7-11

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

We think we know how to pray . . . we even go through the motions from time to time. But, we really haven't touched the power of prayer. Prayer is what we do between brushing our teeth and combing our hair. We need to learn to pray better. And we can do so by paying attention to Jesus' prayer NOTICES. They are his assurances that the Father answers prayers.



You can have a more power in prayer if you cultivate a positive understanding of the character of God.

NOTICE how positive and optimistic Jesus is about answered-prayer possibilities:

“ Ask and it shall be given you . . . you shall find . . . shall be opened unto you . . . ”

He expresses no doubt, no distrust, no skepticism. Even though later Jesus declares men are evil, Jesus announces to us that answered prayer is a certainty. This is a promise better than the winning lottery ticket. Oh, to be this positive!! Oh, to possess the confidence that God gladly hears cracked and flawed sinners; that He is pleased to answer our prayers!

NOTICE the military orders regarding prayer. The verbs “ask,” “seek,” and “knock” are present, active imperatives; that is, they are commands—the language of prayer. Prayer is not an option or a suggestion or a childish activity. Praying is manly. Christian soldiers are ordered by the Commander to pray . . . and it takes brute force and military discipline to pray correctly.

NOTICE the different types of prayers: ask, seek, and knock. There are simple and pure prayers; seeking and searching prayers; knocking and pounding at the door type prayers. Prayers are for the needy, the wanting, and the desperate. Prayers are progressive. There are stages to prayer—simple request type prayers; complex and complicated prayers. Intense prayers that demand time and commitment and urgency. How are we responding to our triple calling?

NOTICE how bluntly and simply Jesus states the negative truth about men. He says, “If you being evil . . .” (πονηροὶ ὄντες); that is, Jesus taught that men are radically and diabolically depraved—a first class conditional in Greek; 1.e. “if and it is true that . . .”. We often classify men as “good” or “great” or “wonderful”, which is an idealistic view of people. But, our Lord has a different theology regarding men. People are evil! Rulers are common sinners! If Jesus were to proclaim the depravity of elected officials today in America, He would receive the hatchet by the media for not being politically correct. If He were to insinuate our current president as being evil, he would be charged with a felony (HR 347 2012). Jesus does not deny that men are made in the image of God or loved by the Father, but he is real about human nature. Evil is at work in and through men. But, our Father graciously answers prayer to those who make requests to Him! Are we realistic about men? Perspective is critical.

NOTICE how Christ uses a “reduction absurdum argument” to prove that God answers prayer: The reasoning behind a “reduction absurdum argument” is a pricking of the mind by drawing a ridiculous conclusion from a legitimate premise. In His lecture, Jesus seeks to inspire confidence in God’s willingness to answer prayer by focusing on the human father-son relationship by drawing an absurd conclusion from a legitimate request. Even bad fathers do not give their children rocks and scorpions when they ask for fish and bread. For a father to respond so callously is radical and absurd. Likewise, it is insane to think that the Heavenly Father will not grant the legitimate requests of His people. Is God stingy and poor? God does not throw us bones when we ask for meat. “The blessings of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it” (Prov. 10:22). He does not cast us a spinning lure with a hook in it. If there is “a hitch” with an opportunity, it is not from God. If there is “good news” and “bad news” scenario, it is not from God. God is a Father who only gives good gifts to His people. Evil things are from Satan, not the Father.

NOTICE how Christ uses a “fortiori argument” to prove that the Father answers prayer generously. The reasoning behind a fortiori argument is if something less likely is true, then something more likely is true as well. The language of the fortiori argument

is “how much more”—a lesser to greater type reasoning designed to establish certainty. If evil men know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more does our all benevolent, all wise, all caring, all knowing, all present, all powerful Heavenly Father know how to give what is good to His children. “Much more” is an adverb defining the type of giving God does. He is superlative at gift giving. The word “gifts” is plural. He gives more abundantly than loving, human fathers.

Before us is a contrast between the explicit goodness of evil men and the implicit goodness of a holy God. Man is depraved . . . and though evil is at work among fathers, they can give good gifts! And, if evil men can give good gifts, how much more will a good God give excellent gifts to his children? Christ does not say that God answers prayers because we are good, or because our prayers are good, but because God is good. Prayers are answered because God is good, always good, and only good; therefore, His gifts are always good. Do we share this positive view of Father?

NOTICE the phrase, “your father which is in heaven.” At the time Jesus said this, He dropped a bombshell on Jewish theology. The Jews believed in a holy, transcendent God; but, a happy, condescending Father was a unique and refreshing view to them. Possibly, men saw God as holy and aloof; some may have seen Him as miserly and stingy. But, Jesus announces God as a caring, benevolent, involved Father. The Father is not a creative engineer that abandons His children to grind out an existence alone under the raw laws of nature (deism). The Transcendent condescends to meet the needs of his attentive children. Heaven’s ears are tuned to earth’s cries!

NOTICE that Jesus did not say all prayers are answered. There are many gods and many prayers in the name of those gods. There is only one God that answers prayer. . . and that is the God of the Bible—the one, true, infinite personal triune Spirit—the God of Creation, the God of Israel, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. His name is YHWH, the “Great I Am.” God is not a force or “the first cause,” nor is He all that exists (pantheism). Jesus offers no assurance that prayers offered to man-made gods have the same wonderful result as that of a Christian praying to his Heavenly Father. He offers no assurance that the prayer of rebels receives a hearing. But, he does offer God’s children the assurance that their Heavenly Father delights in being a good to His children.

NOTICE that God’s view of good is different from man’s view of good. Jesus taught that God gives “good things.” God is good all the time and only gives good gifts to His sons. But, only God can define what is good. An anomaly arises because we

define “good” in terms of the material and the sensual, but God defines “good” in terms of the spiritual. In Luke 11:3 in a similar sermon, Jesus adds, “how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” Men tend to define “good” in terms of “stuff.” But, Jesus sees the greatest good as the gift of the Holy Spirit. “He blesses us with every spiritual blessing” says the Apostle (Eph. 1:3). Even our suffering produces good (Rom.8:28). Our daily concerns are about paying bills, buying cars, and accumulating more cash. It’s the economy, stupid!” said the Clinton administration. Christians are intensely concerned about the economy, money, the stock market, jobs, inflation and gas prices, but who is concerned about a shortage of the Holy Spirit? What is the real crisis in America? “It’s the Holy Spirit, Christian!” Surely, we should be coveting more of the fruits of the Spirit like “Love, joy, peace . . .”(Gal. 5:22-23) and be less concerned about “stuff.”

All believers have the Holy Spirit, but not all are filled with the Spirit or yielded to His work of transforming us into the image of Christ. Some of us are sugar cubes; some of us are ice cubes; but, God wants to make us cubes of salt—the type of Christians that confront evil and heal men. For this task, we need a greater portion of the Holy Spirit.

Our goals are too earthly; our vision too murky; our ambitions too small; our expectations too shallow; our wants too carnal; our wishes too material. We need an expanded view of God; an enlarged expectation; a brighter light; a sharper vision; a greater discernment; a change in priorities; a more positive view of possibilities; and, a more intense commitment to prayer.

We are served NOTICE by Jesus. Be assured, God answers prayer!!

The Power of United Prayer!

Acts 4:24-5:16

“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is. . . And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness . . . ”.



You can have a more power in prayer when Christians pray together and men are united in a holy cause.

During the writing of this paper (August, 2003), the Episcopal Church ordained a homosexual bishop to their ranks. They justified their actions saying they “prayed about it” and that “the Spirit” (?) was leading them into new era of church development. I have no doubt they “prayed about it,” but I know the Holy Spirit did not lead them to sanction such wickedness in their ranks. The great question before us is this: “How do we recognize answered prayer, and in particular, how do we recognize the filling of the Holy Ghost?”

You can reap dynamic fruit by planting the seeds of prayer in heavenly soil.

DYNAMIC SHAKING

Before us is a prayer meeting—one of the most powerful, dynamic prayer meetings in the history of the church. We do not know for sure where the disciples were assembled. Maybe it was at the temple or maybe they met in a home. Out of this prayer meeting, we see the dynamic results of the Spirit moving among God’s people. The text says, “the place was shaken.” Whether this was a literal, physical shaking or a vigorous spiritual shaking within the hearts of God’s people is difficult to say. Since the subject of the verb is “place,” I assume Dr. Luke referred to a literal earthquake. “The place,” not the saints, were shaking. We know this result, along with the other results in this chapter, was germane to this prayer meeting. The word “prayer” is a genitive indicating that the source of this earthquake was not due to geologic forces, but due to the forces of prayer.

DYNAMIC FILLING

The text says, “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” While all believers are baptized by the Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13) and sealed with Spirit (Ephesians 1:13) when they believe, not all believers are presently filled with the Spirit. The word “filled” is synonymous with “total surrender” or “complete yieldedness” or “complete control” by the Spirit. Dr. Luke is telling us that the Spirit was in charge of the saints. What happens when the Spirit is in control of God’s people? We should note what did not happen here. Pentecost was not repeated. They did not speak in tongues. They did not shake and begin to roll in the aisles. They did not lose control of themselves. The fruit of the Spirit is “self-control” (Galatians 5:22).

DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP TO THE BIBLE

The text says they spoke the Word of God. They did not talk about their experiences. They did not discuss the weather, the results of last year’s Olympics, or politics. They did not retreat to some mountain in Tibet to meditate. They did not look inward and begin to inspect their childhood failures. They did not quote Plato or Aristotle. Nor did they lose control of themselves and start uttering jibber-jabber. They spoke the Word of God.

To be filled with the Spirit means to be filled with the Word of God. In Ephesians, Paul said, “Be filled with the Spirit speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (5:18). In the parallel passage in Colossians, the text reads, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (3:16).

We are living in a day an age where people lack confidence in God’s living Word. When Christians hurt, many turn to “self-help” books. Others consult with psychologists, the high priest of secular society. When Christians want to improve their lives, some look to government programs to help them overcome their financial crisis. Others turn inward to seek personal, subjective experiences. When the Episcopalians ordained their first homosexual bishop, many of the leaders justified the new move by saying, “the Spirit is leading us . . .” Lacking was any significant discussion regarding the Word of God. When an individual denies the sufficiency of God’s Word or a church abdicates the authority of God’s Word, they are like a ship without a rudder on the sea of human opinion. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20).

DYNAMIC BOLDNESS

The word “boldness” (parrhsi,aj) means “to be frank,” “full of confidence,” or “fearless.” Fear is one of the giants that causes God’s people to cower and take flight during a fight for the faith. These messianic Jews had every reason to be afraid. The same group that crucified Jesus had the apostles arrested. All of them faced the fear of rejection and the possibility of crucifixion. But, they overcame that fear by the power of prayer and the dynamic filling of the Holy Spirit.

DYNAMIC FELLOWSHIP

Dr. Luke says, “And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul” (4:32). Prayer resulted in dynamic unity and fellowship. When churches are fragmented and divided, and people are isolated and alone, you can bet your boots that people are not filled with the Spirit. Healthy people associate. Unhealthy people stand aloof. If one wants to follow God, he must follow God with God’s people. People were united in fellowship because they were first united in prayer.

DYNAMIC POWER

Out of this prayer meeting, came dynamic power: “And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 4:33).

The disciples did not talk about their esoteric experiences, but the gospel of Jesus Christ. They did not talk about religion, but the resurrection. They did not give a lecture on theology, but bore witness about history—namely, the literal, physical resurrection of Christ. Man’s hope is not in religion, but in the facts of history. Man’s fundamental problem is not economics, but death. Is there any hope that there is life after death? The disciples did not speculate or postulate, they gave an affidavit about what they had seen and heard. Jesus rose from the dead. That is the hope! That is the message! And, they articulated that message with extraordinary power supplied by the Holy Spirit.

DYNAMIC GRACE

Another result of prayer and the work of the Spirit is listed, “. . . and abundant grace was upon them all (Acts 4:33). Not justice, not criticism, not legalism, not judgment, but grace was released. When saints are going through times of complication or persecution or misfortune, grace greases the squeaking wheels. Prayer returns us to fundamental principles: God is good and gracious. When grace is released in a troubled body, people tolerate diversity and human weakness. Petty differences are ignored. When grace is not present, the spirit of criticism invades the congregation. When we sow prayer in heavenly soil, grace crops up on earth.

DYNAMIC SHARING

Out of this prayer meeting came individual commitments to share physical wealth with those less fortunate. Possibly, many Jews lost their jobs because enemies of the faith dismissed them. Unlike communism and American socialism, which forcibly redistributes wealth through the graduated tax system, this community of believers voluntarily and individually shared their wealth. Prayer plows hard ground and tills the soil so the fruit of giving can yield its crop.

DYNAMIC JUDGMENT

Another result of this prayer meeting and of being filled with the Holy Spirit was intolerance of active sin. The Spirit-filled church could preach the good news to unbelieving people and tolerate diversity and difficulty in their own ranks, but they could not tolerate damnable lies. The Holy Spirit judged the sin of Ananias and Sapphira.

When God judged sin, “great fear” came over the church—not a fear that prevented them from sharing their faith, but a fear that prevented them from sinning against the Father. We walk on a narrow bridge. On one hand, we must accept God’s grace, but on the other hand we must honor God’s holiness. Just as we are called to tolerate human weakness, we are also called to be intolerant of sin. The Psalmist reminds us that “Lovingkindness and truth go before Thee” (84:14). If we error on the side of justice, we can become judgmental and critical toward the brethren. If we error on the side of grace, we can become mushy and “namby-pamby” toward sin. If we do not judge sin, the church and her message are degraded; and, if we do not show grace, God’s people become hurt and isolated. The key is prayer. Prayer cleanses, but it also puts us in touch with grace and forgiveness.

DYNAMIC WORKS

Dynamic works are another crop coming from sowing prayer, “And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people” (Acts 5:12). Miracles are rare in history. They are not non-existent, but they are rare. As a result of this prayer meeting, the apostles were endowed with extraordinary problem-solving ability. It is difficult to say what counts as a miracle. But, somehow prayer puts us in contact with the supernatural so extraordinary things happen. Diseases disappear, money shows up, and opportunities emerge when Christians pray. Prayer brings out the good in people so that people’s needs are met. Some of these deliverances may be

attributed to human instruments and others may be attributed to divine developments. Sow prayers in heaven and watch the crop of dynamic works grow on earth.

DYNAMIC EVANGELISM

Prayer resulted in evangelism: “And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number” (Acts 5:14). These were times when professing faith in Christ could result in persecution, a loss of a job, imprisonment, or even death itself. These were not days when it was comfortable to be a Christian, yet people were coming to Christ. How do we account for such fruit? Sowing prayer is the answer.

One time in my life, I felt like my Christian witness had stagnated. I spent a consider amount of time in prayer about the lack of fruit in my life. A tremendous burden to win souls invaded my heart. I dedicated two weeks to read, and pray, and study the great works on soul winning. Over the next three-months, within the context of my normal ministry, over fifty people professed faith in Christ through personal evangelism; that is, one-on-one. Some are my best friends today. I remember that everything came together for me: opportunity, courage, Bible memory, motivation, power, articulation, and boldness. It was amazing. The only way I can account for the harvest is to attribute it to a mighty moving of the Spirit that sprouted because of prayer seeds.

In summary, prayer puts power in your life. When the Spirit is at work, prayer results in dynamic fruit, some of which are listed in this lesson. If you want to have dynamic fruit in ministry, you must sow the seed of prayer in heavenly soil.

Always to Pray

Luke 18:1

“Men ought always to pray and not to faint”

An acute observer of human behavior, Jesus observed a fatal flaw in the prayers of God’s people. Men quit too easily. In prayer, men are fainters, quitters, and resigners.



You can have a more power in prayer when you never, never quit praying. Better to die on your knees than on your back.

Pulling his disciples aside, Jesus gave them a powerful lesson on prayer saying, “Men ought always to pray and not to faint.”

For this reason, Jesus taught his disciples that prayer is essentially a revolt against evil. Prayer is rebellious because it refuses to accept badness as the normal experience among men. Prayer is the weapon that angry men use to confront the forces of evil around them. And, this is what makes Christianity so different than the philosophies and religions in the world. Christians are in revolt against evil among men. They do not seek to make peace with evil, escape from it, run from it, or hide from it. Christians confront evil through prayer.

In summary, the lesson for Christians is twofold: (a) Nothing destroys prayer like resignation, and (b) evil spreads in an environment of prayerlessness.

Second, Christians ought always to pray and not to faint because Christians have a license to pray. family. Mother still worries about how we are going to pay the bills. My brother Bob is still not on the first string football team. My sister Beth still does not have a boy friend. Grandma still has trouble with shingles, and I’m tired of praying for this family.”

Perhaps You can have fallen into a state of resignation and discouragement regarding prayer. If so, this lesson is for you.

You should not give up praying for the following reasons:

First, Christians ought always to pray because prayer is the primary means of overcoming evil.

The word for “faint” in verse one is the Greek word ἐγκακεῖν (ev kakein). It is made up of two words “en” which means “to turn inward,” and “kakeo” which means evil. It can be translated, “Men ought always to pray, and not to turn in to evil. When we stop praying, we give in to evil.

All religions and philosophical systems assist people in living with evil or in trying to escape it. The Greek stoics criticized Christians because they were unwilling to accept the world as it is. Buddhism is not a religion as much as it is a philosophy on how to negotiate with suffering in the world. In secularism, life is an end in itself. It refuses to include God in life’s equation. Consequently, the norm is life as it is. Hinduism seeks to escape suffering by exerting mind over matter; that is, Hinduism does not seek to confront evil but to escape it by rechanneling mental energies. Even among the Christian community, prayer is viewed as wasted energy. When the press asked Paul Tillich, the death-of-God theologian, if he prayed, Tillich responded, “No! I do not pray; I meditate

The Greek word “ought” (dei/n) is a word that places a duty or injunction on men. It is a polite command that calls the will of man to enjoin the process of prayer. By using the adverb “always” (pa,ntote), Jesus is providing us with a license to pray any time at any place.

This view of prayer was totally different than that rabbinical Judaism which taught that Jews should only pray three times in one day lest they be a pest praying.

Prayer is not our idea. We did not make it up. We did not create it. It simply does not originate with man. The license to pray any time, any place, for any reason is a gift of God.

To reinforce the need to always pray and not to give up, Jesus told his disciples a parable about an unjust judge who was plagued by a relentless widow. Apparently, she kept showing up in court and would not leave until the unjust judge honored her pleading. From this parable, we learn more reasons why a person should always pray and not give up.

Third, we ought always to pray and not to faint because God is just.

Jesus told the parable of the Unjust Judge because He wanted to contrast this Judge with His Heavenly Father. The judge was evil and selfish, but God is good and generous.

Jesus' argument is an argument from the less to the greater. If this widow, through her persistence, motivated this hard, stubborn, recalcitrant judge, surely, we can prevail in the courtroom of a good and just Judge.

Notice that Jesus' sees prayer as a legal pleading, a motion before the Supreme Court of Almighty God.

Notice Jesus' view of God. Jesus saw God as an all-powerful, all-good, all-generous Judge. The idea that God is stingy, reluctant, and too busy for us cannot be found in this passage.

Four, Christians ought always to pray and not to faint because Christians have a special standing in the Court.

He calls believers "His elect." The widow was the weakest, poorest member of the Jewish society and yet she prevailed before the unjust judge. Surely, we who are God's children, the apple of His eye, can receive special favors before the Court. We are not merely Citizens of a God's kingdom, but His beloved children. He may not listen to others, but surely, He will listen to us.

Five, Christians ought always to pray and not to faint because they have a special promise.

Jesus commanded us to hear what the unjust judge said. Then, Jesus asked an important question, "And shall not God avenge His own elect . . .?" A positive answer is expected. If the unjust judge can be prevailed upon, surely, the just Judge will grant justice to His own.

Jesus continued, "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." Notice Jesus said, "I tell you . . ." Jesus was not supposing, but speaking from His own authority. The word "speedily" can be translated "quickly" or "suddenly." I think the word "suddenly" is more appropriate in this section of Scripture. Jesus assures his disciples, by His own word, that God's ears are always open to pleadings from His children and that He will answer them suddenly.

Six, Christians ought always to pray and not to faint because the Court is always open.

All courts in America operate between 8:00 and 5:00 PM, and they recess for lunch. But, God's court is never closed. Court is never in recess. Court is never over booked. For this reason Jesus anticipated that God's children would plead, "day and

night.” There is always hope that our prayers will be answered because we always have access to the Judge.

Seven, Christians ought always to pray and not to faint because tough, persistent prayer cannot be resisted.

Notice what the unjust judge said to himself, “I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me” (18:5). The word “weary” (ὀπωπιάζῃ) is another interesting Greek word. It means “to strike one in the eye.” Literally, it means “to give another a black eye” or “to give one an evil stare.” Imagine with me for a moment that old lady coming into court day after day after day with her doubled fists and giving the ornery judge her evil stare. Her piercing look struck fear into his wicked heart.

When is the last time you gave God a black eye in prayer? When is the last time you gave God the evil stare?

Notice the imperfect verb in verse three, “she was coming unto him.” The imperfect implies continuous action in the past, that is, this widow kept coming and coming and coming and coming into this court.

When is the last time you exhausted Heaven with your constant, continual, unceasing prayers?

Persistence is always the key to success in any endeavor in life whether it be music, writing, pursuing a degree, business, or prayer.

The Brazilians have a special word for perseverance. It is called “garra.” *Garra* means fingernails. A person with *garra* hangs in there with their fingernails.

Columbus had *garra*. Halfway through his voyage across an ocean none had ever sailed and going to a world no man had ever seen Columbus’s crew urged him to turn back. They even blackmailed him emotionally by threatening mutiny. Because Columbus hung in there by his fingernails, history was changed forever.

Remember Churchill? In the darkest hour of his war against Germany, Churchill came on the radio and said to his bomb-battered, war-weary people, “Never, never, never, never, never give up.” The British Bulldog spoke from the surf and foam of his soul and through his leadership, the English defeated Germany in WWII.

Have you heard of Beth Anne DeCiantes, the Olympic runner, who attempted to qualify for the 1922 Olympic trials marathon? In order to qualify as a female, she had to finish the 26 mile race in less than two hours and forty five minutes (2:45). At mile 23,

her legs turned to lead. Struggling, she managed to reach the final straightaway at 2:43 and only two minutes left to qualify. Two hundred yards from the finish, she stumbled and fell. She was down 22 seconds. The crowd shouted, "Get up. Get up. Get up." With less than a minute to go, she staggered toward the finish line. Five yards from the finish line with only 10 seconds to go she collapsed again. The crowd roared. Beth could not stand up. Beth Anne DeCiantes crossed the finish line with garra crawling on her hands and knees in two hours, 44 minutes, and 57seconds.

In conclusion, Jesus observed a weakness in human nature that hindered powerful prayer. Unanswered prayer happens because religious men are quitters and fainters. In order to correct the problem, Jesus gave the disciples a list of reasons to persevere in prayer. Surely, Jesus reasoned, men ought always to pray and not to give into evil because our good God answers the prayers coming from His persistent children.

He concluded with a question, "When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?" Notice how Jesus links faith and prayer together at the last moment. The verb "comes" is an aorist participle talking about His first coming on earth, not His second. The idea is this: The Son of man, having come, shall He find the faith on the earth? What is your answer? The definite article in front of "faith" infers that Jesus is talking about the faith of the widows, that is, faith like the widow who was persistent in her prayer.

What is your answer to Jesus' question? I hope it is a "Yes!" As long as you and I are on the earth, I hope Jesus will find us persisting in prayer because we believe His instructions about prayer.

Prayer as a Legal Pleading

Psalm 50:15

*“And call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you,
and you will honor Me.”.*



You can have a more power in prayer by responding to God’s summons to pray; that is, look at prayer as a court summons. Appear or be cited for contempt.

A child of God will never know God’s strength until he has met adversity. Trouble may be the black horse upon which blessing rides. You can find Christ in an empty wallet but He is seldom found in a cash box. There is something about difficulty that causes us to dig deeper, pray better, and work harder.

Some time ago, I was unfairly sued along with another Christian in retaliation for a lawful action. Though I did nothing wrong, I was concerned. I found myself spending hours at the library reading frantically through law books to figure out how to defend myself. My whole life was turned upside down. I did not understand legalese (lawyer talk), comprehend procedure, or know diddily about courts and judges. With the help of my lawyer friend, I scratched out “an answer to the complaint,” “a motion to dismiss,” “a counter complaint,” and “a motion for summary judgment.” Over a few months my knowledge increased and my confidence grew. On the day of my hearing, I argued pro se and the judge dismissed all charges against me because the plaintiff’s accusations were frivolous. But, the judge sustained my counter complaint! What an ordeal! What an education!

One thing I learned is that prayer is much like a legal pleading, and if you will learn to plead your case properly before the High Court of Heaven, your prayers can be more effective.

You can prevail in prayer in the day of trouble by properly pleading your case.

PLEAD OBEDIENCE TO THE SUMMONS

In Psalm 50, “the Mighty One, God, the Lord speaks and summons the earth . . . that He may judge his people” (1-4). A summons is a citation ordering a defendant into court to face a charge. Right or wrong, true or false, convenient or inconvenient, if the

defendant does not show up for court, presumption of guilt prevails and the plaintiff will be awarded a judgment.

Here, it is the Judge, the Might One (El), God (Elohim), the Lord (YHWH) who issues the summons. It must be obeyed. When we come before the Throne of Grace, we are not there because of human presumption, but by Divine command. A summons must be answered or the defendant is presumed guilty due in part to the Doctrine of Estoppel by Acquiescence. Prayer is not man's invention, man's prerogative, or man's contrivance. Prayer is simply obedience to an Order of the Court, and we would do well to honor it. When you pray, acknowledge that you are before the Bench in response to His summons.

PLEAD THE PURPOSE

The said purpose of the summons is stated: "that He may judge His people." A judge not only condemns, he justifies; he not only punishes offenders, he protects victims. In the Book of Judges, Israel's judges rose up to defend the nation against foreign powers that had enslaved them. A judge was a savior, not an accuser; a victor rather than a villain; a warrior king rather than a wailing prosecutor. The purpose of this summons is for protection. The judge intends to bless, not condemn. Yes, the Judge has a complaint against His people, but his purpose is to remove the infraction and bless His people.

PLEAD THE PROPER PARTY

"He summons the heaven above, and the earth, that he may judge His people; Gather to Me my consecrated ones, who made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."

A hearing before a court cannot occur unless the proper parties are present. A proper party is one who has an inherent interest in the subject-matter of the litigation.

Here God calls upon His people to appear in His Court. He calls them "His consecrated ones" (godly ones) and those "who made a covenant with Him." Are you one of His people? Have you made a covenant with Him? Are you a Party Injured? Then, you are the Proper Party and You can have a right to appear in Court and motion the Court to provide a remedy. God has set His love upon you, elected you before the foundation of the world, and washed you in the blood of the Lamb. Surely, of all persons, You can have a right to move the Court.

If you are not "godly" and are not a partaker of the "new covenant," then you are not the Proper Party and You can have no right to approach the Bench!

PLEAD JURISDICTION

“Hear, O my people, and I will speak . . . I am God, your God.”

Jurisdiction is a term of comprehensive importance. It determines the powers of the courts to inquire into facts, apply laws, make decisions, and declare a judgment. It is the first issue to be decided in any case. Does the court have the authority to hear the case? An American living in the U.S.A. has no duty to the laws of Russia. A New York Court cannot try a Delaware resident. A federal court has no jurisdiction over a private Citizen.

Here, God is claiming in personam jurisdiction over His people because He is their God. Heaven’s Court has jurisdiction over “the earth” (50:1), “the east and west” (50:2), “Zion” (50:2), the “heavens” (50:4), “his people” (50:4), the “saints” (50:5), but the “wicked” have no right to petition the Honorable Court (50:16). If you are God’s child, the Court has in personam jurisdiction over you, and You can have a right to plead your case before the Judge.

PLEAD THE OPPORTUNITY

The Judge orders, “Call upon me in the day of trouble.” (50:15).

Trouble is an opportunity. God cannot deliver a man who is not in trouble, or heal a man who is not sick, enrich a man who is not poor, or forgive a man who is not sinful. Trouble gives you the right to expedite your case; the right for special considerations; and, the right to waive honorable court rules. Do you remember the elections of 1990 when Bush defeated Gore in Florida by only a few hundred votes? Lawyers challenged the election process and motioned the Supreme Court to expedite their case because of the election crisis. The Court dispensed with special publication rules. Instead, the lawyers submitted their briefs on regular 8 ½ x 11 paper. Likewise, if you are in a day of trouble, surely, the Court will waive certain expectations. You can haven’t time to tweak your prayers and adjust your motions. Just get into the Courtroom and plead your cause. The day of trouble is a day of opportunity.

PLEAD THE TIME

“Call upon me in the day of trouble.”

Maybe You can have a wayward son, or a health crisis, or financial need. Yesterday, you were not in trouble. Today you need deliverance. Tomorrow will be too late. If it is a midnight hour and there are only a few grains left in the hourglass, then plead the time—the day of trouble.

PLEAD THE CHARACTER OF THE JUDGE

“Call upon me.”

In our country the courts are considered incorruptible, and they are! But, the judges sitting on the bench are very flawed. But, not so with Heaven’s Judge. He is too good to be corrupted. Too righteous to be partial; too holy to be tainted; too just to be unfair; too gracious to be critical of what may appear to be petty concerns--imperfect prayers, and an imperfect life. Come before His Majesty and say, “Lord, I appeal to You who are too great to change, too good to lie, too compassionate to overlook my plight . . .”

PLEAD THE COURT’S ORDER

The Court has ordered you to “Call . . .” in the day of trouble. By calling, you are not being a pest. You are not a nuisance. You are not an inconvenience. A judge’s order must be obeyed! Prayer is the proper way of motioning the Court to act. David motioned the Court, “Hear my prayer,” a qal command in Hebrew (Psalm 4:1). It is no mistake that the language of prayer is in the imperative. The petitioner respectfully moves/commands the Court to honor his motion. And, His Court is never closed. Never too busy. Never over scheduled. Never bogged down with cases. He has commanded you to come. An order of the Court is not to be ignored. Would He have delivered the summons if He did not intend to honor it?

PLEAD THE PROMISE

The text says, “ Call . . . and I will deliver you.” The word, “deliver” (#lx, chalats) is a Piel verb meaning that extra intensity is intended in the deliverance.

The word “deliver” means “to draw out.” It is translated “tear out the stones” in Leviticus 14:40 supplying the imagery of removing difficult, heavy problems. It is translated “watered garden” in Isaiah 58:11 implying that God will refresh the weary, thirsty soul. It is translated “to present the breast” in Lamentations 4:3. The imagery here is of nursing mother pulling out her breast to give her crying baby milk to drink and comfort to feel.

The phrase “I will” certifies that the Judge will honor His promise. He who is holy and just can be nothing but faithful and true. The Judge is not poor. “Every creature in the forest” and “every bird in the mountains” and “ the cattle on a thousand hills” are His (50:1-12). The Judge is not unwilling. He has commanded you to “Call.” The Judge is not unable, “for nothing shall be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). If necessary, He will shake heaven and earth to come to your rescue. He will provide a path through your Red Sea.

The fact that the Judge will deliver is forever settled--Further more saith not. But, what is not settled is the “when” of the deliverance. For this, the supplicant must trust the Wisdom of the Court, for the “spirit of wisdom and understanding” are upon Him (Isaiah 11:2). God is seldom early, never late, and always on time.

PLEAD THE PROPER OBJECT

“I will deliver you.”

Will He deliver everyone else, but not me? The “you” in this verse refers back to “his people,” “my consecrated ones,” “my people” and to “Israel” (50:4, 5, 7). You who have put your faith in Christ, are you not a son of Abraham (Galatians 3:7)? Are you not a member of the “called out ones,” the true Israel of God (Matthew 16:16, Romans 9:6)? Having received Christ are you not now His child (John 1:12, 13)? Maybe, He will not answer the wicked, but surely He will answer you, a member of His family.

You may say, “But I am flawed. How can God answer me?” Even better! Plead your weakness. It was to an imperfect, flawed, fractured ritualistic people to whom the promise was given (50:8-14). Did not God say to the ailing apostle, “My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9)?

PLEAD THE PURPOSE OF THE COURT

“I will deliver you, but you shall glorify Me.”

You can have the deliverance, but God must have the adoration. You can have your health, but God must have the honor. You can have your wealth, but God must receive the worship. You can have your pardon, but God must have the praise. If you are a thief of God’s glory, how can He honor His promise to deliver?

Does God delay? He did with Mary’s prayer for her sick brother (John 11). But, maybe a resurrected Lazarus could bring Him more glory than a recovered Lazarus? Did God wait 14 years to answer the prayer of aging Abraham? Maybe, a child from an old man and an old woman could bring Him more glory than the gift of a child to a young bride. Did Jacob’s plea for protection and prosperity happen in the first year of his departure from Canaan? Maybe, an impoverished patriarch with no commodities, two wives, and eleven children could bring Him more glory than a wealthy single bachelor. After defeating Goliath, could not God have made David king of Israel? Maybe, an innocent but vilified fugitive seasoned by years of hardship would make a better king than a naïve boyhood king.

Out of the Darkness

*Out of the dark forbidding soil
The pure white lilies grow.
Out of the black and murky clouds,
Descends the stainless snow.
Out of the crawling earth-bound worm
A butterfly is born.
Out of the somber shrouded night,
Behold! A golden morn!
Out of the pain and stress of life,
The peace of God pours down.
Out of the nails -- the spear -- the cross,
Redemption -- and a crown! (Source Unknown).*

It is not a mistake that a pleading is called, “a prayer” in court. Prayer is much like a legal pleading, and if you will learn to plead your case properly before the High Court of Heaven, your prayers can prevail. Furthermore, saith naught.

A Prayer for Insight

Ephesians 1:15-23

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. . . that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints . . .”



You can have more power in prayer when you pray for wisdom to know how to pray better.

Having concluded his eulogy, Paul bows in prayer for the believers in Asia Minor- who bore the true marks that characterize all Christians: faith in Christ and love for the brethren. Paul’s prayer is a model prayer. It is a good thing to pray the prayers of the Bible. They are insights into what we really need.

Warren Wiersbe tells the story of William Randolph Hearst, a famous art collector, who read the description of a famous painting and decided that he wanted to acquire the piece. He commissioned his staff to find out where the art work was located. After months of searching, his agent reported to Hearst that he found the famous masterpiece. It was located in a warehouse owned by Hearst.

Like William Hearst we may not be enjoying the blessings we already possess. If we do not understand our present riches in Christ, we may engage in a quest for something we already have. One time I saw a book in a store. The title intrigued me. I purchased my prize and took it home only to discover as I was putting it into my library that I already had a copy on my shelf.

Because the Colossians were troubled by their spiritual poverty and did not understand their riches in Christ, they embarked on a spiritual journey into the ghettos of first century metaphysics. Many turned to the empty house of Greek philosophy for answers only to learn in their famine that, “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Christ” (Col. 3:2).

Some turned to Jewish legalism and its strict dietary laws and observance of new moons and Sabbath days only to learn in their cuffs and chains that Christ was the fullness and splendor of the illusive shadows they chased (Col. 2:17). Others turned to the pain-inflicted world of *merkabah mysticism* where participants fasted and abased themselves hoping to obtain a glimpse into the world of spirits. They seem to be

ignorant of the fact that Christ is the essence of all spiritual truth and the source of spiritual wealth (Col. 2:19).

Unaware of their wealth in Christ, Christians sometimes chase spiritual mirages hoping to quench their spiritual thirst. Many are intrigued with pop psychology and its shallow lakes of self-esteem, self-fulfillment, and self-actualization. Some let go of the spiritual altogether to pursue the material things of this world.

You don't have to go down rabbit trails in pursuit of spiritual wealth. If you understand and pray this prayer, you can begin to enjoy your riches in Christ.

INSIGHT INTO THE PLAN OF GOD

1:17-18 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

The key request in this prayer is "may give" (didomai), a subjunctive aorist. It is a request that God would immediately go to work and to grant the petition.

We do not need more spiritual blessings, more peace, or a higher life. We need the "spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (1:17); that is, we need insight into what we already have. The term "spirit" lacks the article. This is not the Holy Spirit, but an attitude or disposition that seeks wisdom and revelation. Revelation is the acquisition of knowledge. Wisdom is the practical application of knowledge. The word "sophomore" (wise fool) contains the Greek word "wisdom" (Sophia). We do not need more revelation, but we do need more insight into the Revelation of God in Christ. We are blessed with galaxies of riches in Christ but only acquire planets of the wealth in the universe of the gospel of Christ.

The eyes of our heart need to be enlightened so we may know the hope stored up for the saints. To the Greek, the word heart (kardia) did not refer to the seat of emotions, but to the door of the mind. The term "eyes" does not refer to the eye of the body, but the eye of the soul. Paul is not praying that believers would feel good or increase their self-esteem but that they might value their inheritance. He is not praying that believers would obtain ecstatic experiences from God, but that they would BE ENLIGHTENED about the blessings bestowed upon them when they first trusted Christ (1:3). The need is for light, not heat; for reformation, not revival.

Believers are often like impoverished street people huddling together around a candle on a cold winter night not knowing that right around the corner is God's treasure house. Christians do not need more spiritual wealth, but they do need a bright light to see the riches contained within the gospel; in election (found in Ephesians 1:4), in predestination (1:5), in adoption as sons (1:5), in redemption (1:6), in forgiveness (1:6), in the revelation of the mystery of his will (1:9, 10), in His inheritance (1:11), in the gospel of salvation (1:13), in the good faith deposit of the Spirit (1:13, 14), in one's identification with the history of Christ (2:1-7), and into the mystery that the church is the temple of God (Ch.2-3).

INSIGHT INTO THE POWER OF GOD

1:19 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,.

GNT Ephesians 1:19 καὶ τί τὸ ὑπερβάλλον μέγεθος τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς τοὺς πιστεύοντας κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ κράτους τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ.

"Dynamite" and "dynamo" are derived from the Greek word for power (duna,mewj). Two Greek words define the quality of this power. The word "great" (me,geqoj) means huge in size. Various English words are derived from the term "great" (mega): megaphone, megabyte, and megaton (the explosive force of a million tons of TNT). The word "surpassing" comes from the Greek word *uperballo* which means "to throw beyond." It was used by Olympian champions who threw beyond other javelin throwers. God's megatons of power was exerted in raising Jesus from the grave. Even with all the doctors and scientists and megatons of TNT available, none can raise the dead. In raising Christ to God's right hand in glory, God out threw man's abilities, expectations, and dreams.

Greek words are used to describe this power.

The Greek word *energia* refers to the potential force of a thing. It is referring to all the capacities of divinity.

Another word in this series of descriptions is the word *ischus* (ἰσχύος) which is the source of all power in God. When this potential force is released from the source of God's power, it produces *kratos* (κράτους) or work.

Kratos is translated "strength" or "might" in Mary's Magnificat, Mary attributed the miracle of her pregnancy to the *kratos* / strength of God. Somehow, Paul wants us to

know and understand the potential energy (energia) of God's megaton power (dunamos) coming from the source of His strength (ischus) that was released with great force (kratos) in history when He raised Christ from the dead.

This power is available for believers. It is near us, on us, in us, around us. Like the stars, his power is always there.

Paul did not pray for power to do God's will, but that we might know we already possess the power extended to us in to do God's will. If we know His will and His strength, we can experience His power.

INSIGHT INTO THE POSITION OF CHRIST

Eph. 1:20-21 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, 21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

Paul prays that believers might know how great the risen Christ has become not only in His resurrection, but in His ascension and His session at the right hand of the Father (Ephesians 1:19-22). The Lord Jesus Christ holds the greatest position in the universe. The phrase "right hand" refers to the ultimate position and honor within a kingdom. He is the greater Joseph in charge of Pharaoh's kingdom. The term "far above" intensifies the authority of Christ. He is above ALL and over ALL the following jurisdictions:

☉ **Principalities:** The Greek term *arche* refers to the first cause, the first in a series, or the principal ruler of a nation: king, prince, president, general, or prime minister.

✠ **Powers:** The Greek word power (ἐξουσία) refers to delegated authority within a kingdom, the extension and limitation of power: magistrates, bureaucrats, counsels, legislators, senators, police, and armies.

☉ **Mights:** This is our word *dunamis* which refers to the power of a government. Governments have no rights, only power. People have rights; government has power.

☉ **Dominions:** The word dominion (κυριότητος) is derived from the term "lords." It refers to the boundaries of a lord's rule; i.e. the domain of his rule; his jurisdiction. These dominions would include the nations on earth as well as the spiritual realm where Satan rules.

Every name that is named: No matter what power, king, government, or authority arises in history, Christ will always have a superior name, a superior accomplishment, superior authority, and superior honor.

While kings and rulers on earth have great authority and power, they also have great limitations. Our Lord has greater authority, greater power, and has no limitations. His authority not only extends to this age, but to the age to come; not only to the church, but to the State.

HEAD OF THE CHURCH

1:22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the Head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:15-23).

What does it mean that Christ is Head of the Church?

It refers to our Lord's position as Master, Commander, Lord, Chief, Sovereign, and King of the church.

It refers to our Lord's dignity and authority as supreme Ruler of the New Israel. Israel had king-rulers over them, and the church as a new Israel, has the Lord Jesus Christ as its King. He is head of redeemed humanity. As Head of the church, He is preeminent. As Head, He is worthy of honor and esteem and worship. Our goal is to glorify our Head. A failure to comprehend the greatness of Christ is like treating the Queen of England as a common maid. It is not only a major social faux pas, but evidence a person lacks prudential judgment. Christ is "not the man upstairs" but the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, the King of the Nations (Jeremiah 10:7), and Head of the Church.

It refers to the priesthood of all believers. The church does not have a priesthood, it is a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5-12). While it is wonderful to have others pray for us, each of us has access to the Head of the Church.

It means that our Lord sustains a living organism. The church is not an organization, but an organism; not a corpus of man but a corpus of Christ; not a dead fiction, but living body! As a living organism, the church is entitled to all rights as a spiritual being under His direction. Oh, how the Spirit must be grieved at church leaders who capitulated to the will of the state and consented to turn the living corpus of Christ into a dead corporation. The legal head of the incorporated charitable organization is not Christ, but the IRS.

It refers to the dependent nature of the church. The church owes its existence to the grace of Christ and is sustained by Him and not the grace of the U.S. government. Christ's church is an organism dependent on the Savior, not the government. It is ordered by Him and not State Statutes. The church is sustained by prayer to Almighty God, not pleadings to the almighty State.

It refers to the exclusive authority of Christ and the independent nature of the church. The church owes its existence to Christ, not to men; to Christ, not preachers; to Christ, not the Congress. It operates under church law not IRS law. It is sustained by Christ in heaven, not the government in Washington D.C. The church operates independent of the State and is accountable to Christ, not to men.

While pastors are part of the plan of God, a pastor is not the Head of the church. While the pastor may have certain responsibilities, we must remember the pastor is a fellow servant and pilgrim on this earth. While a church may be elder ruled, the elders are not the Head of the church. While the elders are essential to serving the church, we should remember they are simply trustees of a local church. While a president may be the head of a country, he is not the Head of the church. The church is sovereign by virtue of her relationship to Christ. It was for this reason the Pilgrims left England. In England the King was the self-proclaimed Head of the Church. In church history, the term "free church" meant the church operated independent of and free of any governmental controls. When churches enter into highly restrictive contracts with the government to obtain some government privilege, such organizations waive their natural, God-given, unalienable rights to carry out its mission without interference from the State. When a church has to ask the government for permission to do this or that, the Headship of Christ is compromised. The Scripture warns: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness (the church) with unrighteousness (the government)?"

It means that the church has authority to conduct its mission in this world. If "all authority in heaven and earth" is given to Christ, and Christ has commissioned the church to make disciples of all nations, then Christian servants have authority to minister His word in every part of the world. The church does not need a license from the State to start a church, a school, or a ministry. It does not function under codes and statutes of men, but under the law of Christ. Practically speaking, Christians need to stop asking the state for permission to marry, teach, pass out literature, feed the poor, start a school, or open a storefront to start a church. Forget the BAR attorneys. Remember Christ!

Do you remember Victor Hugo's story, *Les Miserables*? After escaping from the clutches of the police, Jean Valjean finds refuge in a convent. Though the French police knew he was inside, the authorities had no jurisdiction in God's house. It was because the church was under command of a higher power than that of Rome that led the Christians to engage the mission of evangelism and to "turn the world upside down."

What does all this mean? When we grasp the plan of God, the power of God, and the position of Christ, we can claim our riches in Christ and have power to serve Him better.

Pastor Ken Gaub tells the story of the time he was traveling on I-75 with his family from Pennsylvania back to his home in Yakima, Washington. Discouraged and feeling the need to stretch, he stopped to feed his family at a near-by Dairy Queen and to take a walk. While on this short walk, he heard a telephone ring in a near by telephone booth. He picked it up, and the operator asked for Ken Gaub. He nearly fainted. A lady named Millie was struggling with thoughts of suicide. She heard Ken speak and decided to call him because she thought he could help. Picking up a pencil she wrote down the first number that came to her mind. It was a telephone number of the telephone booth Ken was standing next to in a city he had never visited before. Sensing the encounter was from God, he prayed for wisdom and helped the woman through her crisis. Ken, no longer discouraged himself, wrote an article, "God Knows Where You Are."

The key to Christian service is tapping into our Highly Exalted Savior who reigns over All Things. When we operate under His Headship, life flows to us.

If you are like William Randolph Hearst, seeking spiritual treasures , maybe it is because you do not understand the wealth you already have in Christ. This prayer is not about what you can get from God, but about insight into your riches in Christ. You believe in the gospel to partake of its wealth; you pray to understand and enjoy and spend your wealth in the gospel. You may think you need money, or experiences, or psychological help, but you really need insight into Christ Himself. Let us study the Word of God and pray, "Lord, open my eyes that I may see."

A Prayer for Ability

Ephesians 3:14-21

The Book of Ephesians is a “Gold Mine of Gospel Truth” because it takes the believer into the Bank of Heaven and reveals to him the riches of his inheritance in Christ. The Gospel of Salvation is a rags to riches experience. But, believers are often unaware of their wealth and sometimes do not feel wealthy. For this reason, Paul lifts up a prayer in the middle of his treatise because Christians need an expanded capacity to appreciate and enjoy their riches in Christ.



You can have more power in prayer by growing in the knowledge about the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE REASON FOR THE PRAYER

“For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father.”

To find the reason for this prayer, we must go back to verse six, “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” The Gentiles were called “pagans,” “heathen,” “barbarians,” and “dogs,” and “the uncircumcised” by the Jews—not exactly affectionate terms. But through gospel proclamation, Gentiles are being called to salvation and made members of the family of God. All our service, all our giving, and all of our prayers have a reason, and that reason is that we have been blessed with the gift of salvation and we want others to discover this same gift.

THE ATTITUDE OF PRAYER

“For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father.”

In the East, bowing the knee was a term that expressed humility by an inferior in the presence of a superior. It is good for us to get on our knees when we pray. The business of the church is done on its knees. If we want to stand tall, we must learn to kneel. Without humility we cannot expect to gain access into the presence of the Omnipotent. Without apprehending the Father’s dignity, we will not express humility.

THE OBJECT OF PRAYER

“For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.”

Men call the Inexplicable, “God.” The Jews knew Him as “Creator,” “the Almighty,” and “YHWH,” the “Lord” of Israel. In the N.T. Jesus reveals Him as “The Father,” the all-wise, all-caring Giver and Sustainer of life. He is a Father by right of creation and a Father by right of redemption—the new creation. When we pray, we do not pray to a “Force,” or “to a ceiling,” or “to a higher power,” we pray to infinite, personal, triune Spirit—our Heavenly Father.

The Father has a family, not made up of believing Jews only, but of believing Gentiles who have found salvation in Christ. Part of His family is in heaven, and a smaller part of that family is on earth. His family is affectionately called, “the church,” “the temple of God,” the “Bride of Christ,” and “the Israel of God.”

How does one become a member of His Family? One cannot inherit this privilege. One cannot determine to become a member of this family. Nor can the good will of others make one a child of God. One can only become a son by being birthed of God (John 1:12, 13).

FIVE PETITIONS OF PRAYER

Seeing five needs within the family of God, the apostle offers up five petitions:

THE NEED FOR STRENGTH:

“that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.”

As Paul traveled among the churches, he must have been impressed with the power of salvation at work among men, but he also observed weakness among God’s people. God’s people are sometimes like a house of cards-- the slightest tremor and the best among us collapse. We are like an engine that needs a battery to start its pistons churning. Without power the light bulbs of our faith will not give their light. Without wind in our sails, our ship of faith cannot travel from port to port.

The seat of this power is in the inner man. We live in a day and age where men and women place a great emphasis on outer strength. They go to health clubs to swim laps, pump iron, and to ride stationery bicycles. It is possible to be a giant in the gym and a pygmy in the pew. The need among us is for strength in the inner man. When the lions of lust, the demons of doubt, and the pesty foxes of fear seek to devour the heart and soul, we need inner strength.

And where do we get this power? It does not come from our effort, or our activity, or our initiative. It is a gift of grace through His Spirit at work in the inner man.

The Need for Devotion: “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, being rooted and grounded in love, ”

The word dwell means, “to be at home.” The terms “rooted” and “grounded” express permanency. Paul is not praying that people will be more religious. He is praying that the light of the gospel might burn brightly in the heart. He is not praying Christ will make an occasional visit, but that Christ will be at home in the hearts of believers. He is not praying that Christ may have an important place in the heart. He is praying that Christ may have the preeminent place. He is not praying for a quick transplant but that each believer might be like a deep-rooted tree. He is not praying that Christ as a Divine Person will live in each heart, because Christ as a Divine Person lives in heaven. He is praying that the knowledge of the living Christ may find permanent residence in every soul, and that every soul would send roots down into the soil of God’s love.

THE NEED FOR A CAPACITY TO COMPREHEND:

that you may “be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth . . .of the love of God”

We have here a “hina” (purpose) clause, which contains **a main verb** and **two infinities**.

The main verb in this prayer is the Greek word, “exischuo” (evxiscu,shte), which means “to be able to possess strength.” Paul realizes believers need an enlarged capacity to understand the breadth and length and height and depth . . .of the love of God. Getting a hold of the love of God is like trying to hold an elephant on your lap. The love of God is as broad as the outstretched arms of the Savior, as high as His thorn pierced brow, as deep as his nail pierced feet, and as deep as the river of pain that met Jesus at Calvary. Who can grasp it?

The first infinitive is the English word comprehend, which comes from the Greek word, Καταλάβειν, which in turn is a combination of two Greek words, “kata” (down) and “lambano” (to receive or take). The kata is a preposition which adds extra intensity to the verb “to take.” It is translated “seize” in Mark 9:18 and “caught” in John 8:3. The imagery before us is that of a hunt or chase. Paul uses this word because he knows the saints need special strength to be able to catch and seize something so massive and wonderful and virtuous as the love of God.

THE NEED FOR A CAPACITY TO KNOW:

“and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.” The second infinitive is the infinitive “to know” (γινῶναι). Paul wants the believers “to be able” to know in an experiential way the “surpassing” knowledge of the love of God.

By using the word, “surpassing,” Paul is asserting a couple of facts about the love of God.

First, the love of God surpasses everything else worth knowing. We live in an age where knowledge in some fields doubles every two years. We place a great emphasis on acquiring knowledge. We encourage our children to finish high school, to get a college degree, and to obtain field experience. It is possible to have a bucket of academic knowledge but possess only a teaspoon of understanding about God’s love. A man may understand the mysteries of the atom, molecular biology, and the mysteries of light, but if he does not know the love of God, he is poor beyond shame.

Second, God’s love is really unsearchable. It is higher than the highest mountain, broader than the deepest sea, wider than east and west. The peak of God’s love makes Mt. Everest (29, 028 feet) look like a sand dune. It would be easier to swim the 4000-mile long North African Nile than to explore one tributary stream flowing from the sea of God’s love. It is easier to memorize Black’s Law Dictionary than it is to understand one splinter of God’s mercy expressed at the cross of Calvary. God’s galaxies of love come to us in the Son, but we only possess planets of understanding.

THE NEED TO BE HAPPY:

“that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”

So much of life is spent pursuing happiness. Where can we find true happiness? In adventure? In things? In pleasures? Paul knows the heart can only find true happiness when it is in fellowship with the Father. By “the fullness of God,” Paul is referring to the polar attributes of God—his holiness and love. Apparently, it is possible for us to find complete joy in the champagne of God’s revelation to man.

In this prayer, Paul is reaching beyond the galaxies to the very throne of God. It is an impossible stretch, yet Paul dares to ask that God’s finite people might be filled with the fullness of the Infinite. How can the ocean of God’s presence fit into our cup? To be filled with the fullness of God, we must be empty of the self-life with all its idols and lust so we can find our soul’s satisfaction totally in Christ. Paul’s prayer is one of enlargement that we may discover the wine of joy, the pillow of comfort, and the sword of purpose from the presence of Christ in our lives.

THE DOXOLOGY OF PRAYER

Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

After Paul reaches the climax of his prayer, he bursts into an accolade of praise presenting to us the possibility of the impossible.

To Him

To Him Who is able

To Him Who is able to do

To Him Who is able to do that we ask

To Him Who is able to do all that we ask

To Him Who is able to do all that we ask or think

To Him Who is able to do beyond all that we ask or think

To Him Who is able to do beyond all that we ask or think

To Him Who is able to do abundantly beyond all that we ask or think

To Him Who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think

To all generations forever and ever. Amen!

In 1540, Martin Luther had an assistant and friend named Friedrich Myconius. Friedrich became sick and was on his deathbed and wrote Luther a farewell letter. Luther immediately sent a reply, "I command you in the name of God to live because I still have need of you in the work of reforming the church...the Lord will never let me hear that you are dead but will permit you to survive me. For this I am praying because I seek only to glorify the name of God." Fredrieck, who had already lost the ability to speak, recovered and lived an additional six more years to server Luther. He died TWO MONTHS AFTER LUTHER HIMSELF HAD DIED.

Man's chief end is to glorify God. And, God is most glorified when we enjoy Him. Paul prays that that we might give glory in the church to Jesus Christ. He does not receive glory at the U.N., in the Congress, at the Red Cross, or in our public schools. Only an expanded, enlarged church filled with the fullness of God has the ability to give Him glory.

A Prayer for Stability

Philippians 4:1-9

Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. 2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. 3 Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. 9 The things You can have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.



You can have more power in prayer by replacing anxiety with diligent prayer, thanksgiving, and earnest requests.

THE LACK OF PEACE

Paul affectionately calls the church “his beloved,” “his joy,” and “his crown.” But, the church at Philippi was not being a joy. The troops were discouraged and scattered.

The word “therefore” directs us back to the bloody struggle between the “the enemies of Christ” and the “citizens of heaven” (3:18-20). Earthly minds and heavenly minds will always be at war. The one who follows Christ cannot be a friend with the world. The god of the world is their appetite and their glory is their shame, but the God of the Christians is Christ and their glory is His name. In this conflict, the Christian can never make peace.

As in all wars, there are casualties. The church is always under assault, always getting knocked off balance, and always seeking to repair itself. At times the church appears weak having only the strength of a pretzel. Blow by blow, the world presses

forward challenging the Christian community to retreat from its moral ground and retract its beliefs. For this reason, there is a need for stability. The apostle commands the church, the “dearly beloved,” to “stand firm in the Lord.” The verb *στήκετε* (you stand firm) is a present tense verb which implies that the church must stand and keep on standing firm against the aggression of the ungodly and not give ground.

If we want spiritual stability, we must pray regularly, ponder correctly, and practice constantly.

PEACE WITH MEN

The menacing war between the enemies of Christ and the church demobilized the saints at Philippi and scuffles erupted in their own ranks. Two female privates, Euodia and Syntyche, whom some refer to as “Odious” and “Soontouchy,” started raining “death from the sky” on each other. Commander Paul issued a direct order to these two women to drop their weapons and to embrace each other. The words “to agree” means “to be of the same mind;” i.e. they were to search out the mind of Christ on the issues separating them and come to an agreement about His marching orders (2:5-10).

So serious was the contention between these two combatants that Paul recruited other soldiers, “Yokefellow,” to assist in this reconciliation. Facing an armored assault by the world is scary enough, but it pales in comparison to the “friendly fire” that sometimes breaks out in the church. Paul redeployed his troops and channeled their energies towards pursuing internal unity. The church cannot be an instrument of peace to the public if they are not experiencing peace in private.

Pray Regularly

PEACE IN THE HEART

Because these women were “geein’” when they should have been a “hawin’”, Paul commanded His troops “to rejoice in the Lord always.” So important is his order that he repeats it twice. The imperative is a present tense verb implying that this regiment was to rejoice and keep on rejoicing. In other words, Commander Paul directed his soldiers to refocus; i.e. to get their eyes off the things that separated them and to focus their affections on sweet Jesus and the gospel that originally united them.

One time I was involved in a nasty disagreement that erupted in a church in Colorado Springs. Tempers erupted, hairs bristled, and words were exchanged. Just as I was losing hope, one of the mediators in the dispute began to talk about the “sweetness

of Jesus.” Everyone calmed down. We talked for three more hours. Every time things got tense, this spiritual brother started sharing short, sweet thoughts about the Savior. Amazingly, at the end of the heated discussion, everyone embraced. I learned an important lesson that day: When things get tense, start talking about the sweetness of Jesus.

The command “to rejoice” appeals to the will and targets the emotions. Paul redeployed their emotions to express joy. The “joy of the Lord” is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). All of God’s soldiers must be singers. There is something about praise that drives poutiness away. What praise is to God, poutiness is to the devil. God loves it; the devil hates it. If we are not “praisers,” we will be “stinkers” like “Odious” and “Soontouchy.”

The order, “Let your gentleness be known to all men” is an aorist imperative commanding immediate employment of moderation; i.e. in times of stress, we should immediately employ “sweet reasonableness.” Our Lord was a man of steel and velvet, and Commander Paul charged his regiment to adorn their attitudes with velvet in order to restore harmony among the troops.

Commander Paul ordered his army to “be anxious for nothing.” The word “anxious” refers to the mental activity of “worrying” and “fretting.” Paul did not want his troops preoccupied with problems. The term “nothing” is the hammer that hits the thumb. The term eliminates the engagement of ALL anxious thoughts. While worrying may be a socially acceptable sin, it is banned among the troops. The command is a present tense implying that a soldier is NEVER allowed to complain or worry in the service of His King. Worry robs God of glory and man of courage. It motivates retreat. Rather than worry, Paul commands the soldiers to take their concerns to General Jesus in prayer. Three kinds of communications are encouraged at the Command-and-Control Center.

Prayer (proseuche): This refers to the general act of prayer.

Supplication (deesis): This term refers to specific requests in prayer; i.e. respectful arguments in a legal pleading, the articulate reasoning in a formal petition.

Thanksgiving (eucharistia): This refers to an attitude of gratitude as opposed to a demanding spirit.

THE PEACE OF GOD

There is a promise attached to prayer, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (4:7). The term “surpasses” means “to rise above” and is can be translated “to govern” or “to rule over;” or “to have authority over;” 1.e. the peace of God can rise above the worries of the mind and rule the heart. The term “guard” is a military term meaning, “to hold one prisoner,” “to watch,” or “stand guard.” Peace is a settled agreement between two parties. The goal of war is peace. One cannot go to wage war for the gospel if there is no peace in the heart. Prayer is the means of obtaining this peace. Peace acts as a watchman that warns us of an approaching enemy. With out the peace of God standing watch over our hearts, rebel forces can break through our defenses and overrun our operations.

PONDER CORRECTLY

PEACE OF MIND

In our duty to stand firm, we must possess our hearts and minds. Since the emotions are responders to our thoughts, it is imperative that the peace of God stand guard over our thought process. Commander Paul is concerned that the Christian soldier think correctly. We live in a culture that is obsessed with good feelings. Feeling good has become the greatest good. By way of illustration, take the Star Wars trilogy where Luke Skywalker hears the voice, “Luke, let go. Follow your feelings.” This is the dumbest advice we could ever give anyone. If we followed our feelings, there would be lots of people going to the hospital each week with a broken nose. While the psychologists are fondling the touchy-feely realm of human emotions, Paul advances stability by challenging the thought life. Correct thinking is the key to standing firm.

The word “think” or “dwell” comes from the Greek word *logizomai* (λογίζεσθε). It means “to calculate,” “reckon,” “credit,” “consider,” “esteem,” or “to reflect upon.” Thinking, not feeling, is the key to spiritual stability. Feelings follow thinking. Thinking is the engine that pulls the caboose, not the caboose that pulls the engine. To raise the standard of living, we must raise the standard of thinking, and this is what Paul is doing in this passage of Scripture. Straight living cannot come out of crooked thinking.

Think truth: The word for “truth” is *alethes* (ἀληθής). The female name “Alethia” comes from this Greek word. In every war, sides practice ruse and deception in order to confuse their opposition. This applies to the psychological battle as well as to operations and maneuvers. Truth is the Christian compass. It is the program that must run his internal computer. Truth can heal, and truth can injure. “Truth reforms as well as informs,” said the Puritan, William Jeneyh. Like the Sun that can warm the body or

blister the skin, truth can soothe and it can sting. We must seek truth, but truth also seeks us. Whether truth comes by the pound or by the ounce, it must have weight in our life.

Think honorable: The word “honorable” (σεμνά. refers to that quality in human beings, which “calls forth veneration and respect” says Friberg (Friberg lexicon). It is translated “dignity” in 1 Timothy 3:8.

Think right: The word “right” comes from the Greek word δίκαιος (dikaios). We get the word justification from this word. It refers duties in a relationship. To do what is right is to do what is befitting and proper in a human relationship. If we want to do right, we must think right.

Think pure: The word “holiness” comes from this Greek word (ἀγνα). It signifies a dedication to cleanliness; i.e. a separation from sin and an attachment to holiness. It involves a search for anything that might contaminate the soul so that it might be cleansed. It involves a search for virtue, in order that it may be embraced.

Think lovely: The word “lovely” comes from the Greek word *prospiles* (προσφιλής). It is a combination of two words “pros” and “phileo.” It means “attractive” or “beautiful.” If something is winsome and engaging, we can think about it.

Think good repute: The Greek word *euphemos* word means “praiseworthy” or “good report” (εὐφημος), and it is the opposite of something that is condemned or under the ban. The chance of stability is increased when we think about things that are praiseworthy and commendable.

Think excellence: The Greek word *arete* (ἀρετή. refers to moral goodness or virtue. In 1 Peter 2:9 and 2 Peter 1:3 this word names the moral virtue that belongs to God. By excellence, we are not referring to perfection or something out of the reach of man, but the contemplation of the character of God.

Think praise worthy: We get the word praise from the Greek word *epainos* (εἰπαινοῖ), that is, that which is valuable and applaudable. We must answer the question, “Is what I think about commendable?”

Practice Constantly

THE GOD OF PEACE

Paul concludes his treatise on spiritual stability by issuing a final order: Whatever “You can have learned and received and heard and seen in me” practice. The

Philippians heard the gospel message and saw a gospel model in Paul. The word “practice” is a present tense imperative implying durative action; 1.e. do and keep on doing. Like a good soldier, Christians constantly engage practice and drill. A promise is attached to the command: “and the God of peace shall be with you.” The peace of God comes through prayer, but the God of peace comes through obedience. Here He is not promising His peace, but his presence. Prayer is not a substitute for performance.

The Navigator developed this aphorism:

Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap character; sow character, reap a destiny.

In conclusion, if the God of peace is with us, we will multiply the possibility of possessing peace of heart, peace of mind, and peace with men. If we want to “stand firm” and be spiritually stable, we must pray regularly, ponder correctly, and practice constantly. If we do these things we will not only possess the peace of God, but the God of peace will possess us.

When Prayers Are Unanswered

Matthew 15:28

"O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish"



You can have more power in prayer by wrestling with God about unanswered prayer and working through your own deficiencies regarding prayer.

Whenever I hear the words, great faith, my ears pick up. I want to be a person of great faith, don't you? But, what is great faith?

The problem with having "great faith" is that it is often tested and hammered out on the anvil of difficulty. "The Lord tests the righteous," says the psalmist (11:5).

Have you heard about the young man who was an All-American football player in college? He went on to play professional football for a few years and then came back to his alma mater as an assistant coach. One of his main responsibilities in his new job would be to go out and scout and recruit players for his college team. Before he made his first recruiting trip, he went in to visit with the head coach, the same coach for whom he had played when he was there in college some years before.

The head coach was a crusty old veteran. He had held that position as head coach for many years, was widely known and highly respected all across the country. The new young coach said to him, "Coach, I'm about to head out on my first recruiting trip, but before I go I want to be sure that we are on the same page. Tell me, Coach, what kind of player do you want me to recruit?" The crusty old head coach leaned back in his chair. He looked the young coach straight in the eyes and said: "Son, I've been at this job a long time and over the years I have noticed that there are several different kinds of players. For example," he said, "you will find some players who get knocked down and they stay down. That's not the kind we want!" And he said, "You will find some players who get knocked down and they will get right back up and get knocked down again and then they stay down. That's not the kind we want!" And then the old coach said, "But you will also find some other players who get knocked down and knocked down and knocked down, and every time they get knocked down, they get right back up!" At this point, the young coach got excited and he said, "Now, that's the kind of player we want, isn't it, Coach?" "No!" said the old head coach. "We want the one doing all that knockin' down!!"

Well, this is what God wants. He wants the kind of Christian that keeps knockin' the Devil down.

You can knock down your difficulties by activating the virtues of great faith.

GREAT FAITH IS RECRUITED DURING GREAT DIFFICULTIES

Blessing is often carried on the wings of adversity. That is, the greatness of a trial provides an opportunity to bring out the greatness of a faith. It took a Revolutionary War to make a George Washington. The great ride of Paul Revere made history only because the "regulars were a comin'." It took the Civil War to expose the virtues of a man like Abraham Lincoln. John F. Kennedy is best known for his show down with the Russian nuclear crisis. Behind the collapse of the Berlin wall was the courage and strategy of a Ronald Reagan. Likewise, the great faith of the Canaanite woman was exposed because of the perplexing problem that engulfed her daughter.



We know little about this woman except that she was a resident of some village in the region of Tyre and Sidon. This area of ancient Phoenicia was still under the influence of the lifeless religion of Astarte, the pagan goddess. This Semitic goddess was worshipped by the Syrians, Palestinians, Phoenicians, Egyptians and other Semitic Tribes. King Solomon built a Temple to her as Astoreth, near Jerusalem. Astarte is the supposed incarnation of Ishtar and Inanna. Astarte was honored as a goddess of war and tenacity, but to the Semites, she was a goddess of love and fertility. The Greeks called her, "Aphrodite." The Bible calls her, "the abomination" (2 Kings 23:13). Teenage girls often earned their dowry by serving as a temple prostitute. The daughter of the Canaanite woman was probably a devoted occult member and at some time came under the influence of the demon promoting the worship of Astarte. Disenchanted with her ancient religion, the mother of the demon-possessed girl heard about Jesus and determined to gain an audience before Him.

A pastor received this letter, "Dear Pastor, Are there any devils on earth? I think there may be one in my class. Her name is Carla." (Salina, age 10). While westerners may struggle with the concept of demons, we would do well to keep in mind, "the Devil prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

It was demonic difficulty that caused the Canaanite woman to leave the Temple of Astarte and knock at Jesus' door. A difficult trial is always unwelcome, but if it brings us face to face with Jesus, trouble can be our friend.

GREAT FAITH ENDURES UNANSWERED PRAYER

The Canaanite woman began to cry out, praying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed" (Matthew 15:22).

What a wonderful prayer, "Have mercy on me!" The publican prayed this same prayer and went home justified (Luke 18:13), but when this woman prayed, Jesus did not answer her.

Have you ever knocked at Heaven's Gate, and no one answered? What do you do when heaven is pacemaker quiet? Silence, the deafening clanging chatter of silence, has tested the saints throughout the ages. Like a rat on a hot griddle scrambling to escape, silence brings us no relief from the heat of trials. Like a donkey crushed under the weight of heavy load, silence lifts no burden. Like the blistering sun steals the strength from one lost in the desert, silence saps our spiritual vitality. God's delays mangle our emotions, crush our hopes, and knock the wind out of our confidence.

I don't know about you, but I can stand anything except to be ignored. There is nothing more agonizing or more disconcerting than to pray and feel like I am talking to the ceiling. No wonder the psalmist cried, "To Thee, O LORD, I call; My rock, do not be deaf to me, Lest, if Thou be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit." (Psalm 28:1).

But, somehow, some way, faith must endure the strain of unanswered prayer. Abraham endured 17 years of silence waiting for the birth of a son. Moses endured forty years of silence before God spoke to him at the burning bush. Mary's urgent prayer for her dying brother was met with four days of delay. And, he died during the Lord's silence. Why did Jesus wait so long? I don't know for sure, but maybe, a resurrected Lazarus could bring more glory to God than a healed brother. Maybe, a silent Jesus could teach us a lesson about the virtues of great faith.

GREAT FAITH ENDURES DISPASSIONATE BRETHREN

And His disciples came to Him and kept asking Him, saying, "Send her away, for she is shouting out after us" (Matthew 15:23).

If the silence of Jesus was not enough of a test, this poor woman had to endure the acid rejection of Jesus' best pastoral candidates. They saw this woman as a nuisance. Her incessant cries annoyed them and interrupted their vacation in Tyre and Sidon. After all she had three strikes against her. She was a Woman! A Gentile! And, under the

influence of demons promoting the goddess Astarte! Irritated, the twelve prayed to Jesus, "Send her away."

Interestingly, Jesus did not answer their prayers either.

Would you go to these men for counseling? Christians are sometimes like this. We view problems as an annoyance instead of an opportunity to serve; as a source of irritation instead of a chance to glorify God. Sadly, most of us are so bogged down in our personal concerns, we are unwilling to even be around the pungent, tart, putrid odors of locker-stagnated people problems.

If it hurts, send them away!

If it costs, send them away!

If it means a sacrifice, send them away!

If it takes more food, send them away!

If it means additional staff, send them away!

If it means double services, send them away!

If it means a new building program, send them away!

Meeting the needs of hurting people stretch us and break us. But, ministering is the reason for our existence. Let us remember, "There are no comfort zones on the cross!" May none never hear the words, "Send them away," uttered from our lips.

Further, if You can have a need and have been unable to squeeze a drop of compassion out of busy Christians, don't get discouraged. Keep going to Jesus. He knows. He understands. He cares.

GREAT FAITH ENDURES HEAVEN'S REBUKE

But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).

First, this woman's faith had to endure the Lord's silence. Second, it had to endure dispassionate brethren. And now, when Jesus does answer, she receives a rebuke. He informs this woman that involvement with her rancid human problem is not within the mission of his ministry. It was the last thing she wanted to hear. However, the woman didn't get discouraged. She prayed on, "Lord, help me!"

At this point, it is important to note a fault with this woman's theology. In her first petition, she addressed Jesus as, "The Son of David." This was true, but it is strictly

a Jewish term belonging only to the nation of Israel. As a Gentile, she had no right to approach our Lord on Jewish ground, that is, “on the sure mercies of David.” In her second prayer, she addressed Jesus as, “Lord.” “Lord” is Jesus’ universal title on which she had a legal right to approach the Savior. Her refinement of faith was positive and progressive.

Sometimes Heaven is silent because our faith needs to be refined. Our prayers are frayed and flawed; our motivation selfish and skewed; and, our character weak and frail. Sometimes we claim the promises, but ignore the conditions: “If you abide in me (the condition), you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done for you (the promise)” (John 15:7).

Silence gives us time to be instructed and corrected.

If you are passing through a period of unexplained silence, maybe God is seeking to refine and perfect your faith, your motivation, or your character.

GREAT FAITH ENDURES CAUSTIC CORRECTION

And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (Matthew 15:26-27).

Jesus corrected this woman a second time. He insisted that the Messianic blessings belonged only to Israel and not to the Gentiles.

Further, Jesus humbled the woman by calling her a “dog.” The term dog was not a reference to the cute little pets that we have in our homes, but a reference to the mangy, mongrels that scavenged garbage pits searching for rancid meat. Personally, I don’t like being accused and called names. Insult brings out the fierce fighter in me. Villify me, and you had better find a foxhole, quick!

But, you gotta love this woman’s humility and tenacity. Not only did she receive the Lord’s rebuke, she honored Him by saying, “Yes, Lord.” “No” and “Lord” don’t belong in the same sentence, do they? Picking up on the dog analogy, the woman reasoned to a truth that she was simply the Lord’s pet seeking croutons from underneath His table of dainty miracles.

Likewise, if you feel like you are on God’s anvil being smashed by the hammer of adversity, maybe God is refining your faith to the glory of Christ.

GREAT FAITH RECEIVES GOD’S REWARD

“Then Jesus answered and said to her, ‘O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish. And her daughter was healed at once’” (Matthew 15:28).

Not only did this woman receive the bread for which she begged, Jesus drew attention to her great faith and honored it for all to admire.

This Canaanite woman had great faith because she passed the tests given her by heaven. She didn’t quit, collapse, or plunge into self-pity. She kept coming, kept praying, kept pleading, kept reasoning, and kept knocking until she received her answered prayer.

Ready for a baseball trivia question? Who is Clint Courtney? If you're unsure, don't bother requesting the answer from Cooperstown, N.Y. Clint never came close to making it into the Baseball Hall of Fame. In fact, it's very doubtful that his picture appeared on any bubble gum cards. This guy wasn't a legend in his own time -- not even in his own mind. He was only a memory maker for his family, and a few die-hard fans who were inspired by his tremendous fortitude. Clint played catcher for the Baltimore Orioles in the 1950s. During his career he earned the nickname of Scrap Iron, implying that he was hard, weathered, tough. Old Scrap broke no records -- only bones. He had little power or speed on the base paths. As for grace and style, he made the easiest play look rather difficult. But armed with mitt and mask, Scrap Iron never flinched from any challenge.

Batters often missed the ball and caught his shin. Their foul tips nipped his elbow. Runners fiercely plowed into him, spikes first, as he defended home plate. Though often doubled over in agony, and flattened in a heap of dust, Clint Courtney never quit. Invariably, he'd slowly get up, shake off the dust, punch the pocket of his mitt once, twice, and nod to his pitcher to throw another one. The game would go on and Courtney with it -- scarred, bruised, clutching his arm in pain, but determined to continue. He resembled a POW with tape, splints, braces, and other kinds of paraphernalia that wounded people wear. Some made fun of him -- calling him a masochist. Insane! Others remember him as a true champion (Jon Johnston, *Courage - You Can Stand Strong in the Face of Fear*, 1990, SP Publications, pp. 35-36).

Likewise, if Heaven is silent, your prayers are going unanswered, and you “resembled a POW with tape, splints, braces, and other kinds of paraphernalia that wounded people wear”, draw upon the virtues of faith and keep knocking, and

knocking, and knocking until you receive that for which you are seeking. Your faith is being tested.

The Praying Church

Acts 12



You can have more power in prayer by praying together for the great needs of the church and its ministers.

When a rock rolls down a hill it will eventually come to rest. When an automobile runs out of gas, it will eventually stop along the side of the road. In physics, we call this the law of entropy, i.e. the available amount of energy in a closed system diminishes. All systems are moving toward a state of rest. As a church, we are always fighting rest, inertia, loss of energy. The tendency of every Christian movement is toward entropy. Ours is no different. At times we feel tired, sluggish, and sooo busy. What do we do when the second law of thermodynamics dominates our lives?

There was a church like this in the Bible—the Jerusalem church (Acts 12). They were at least 12,000 strong at one time in their history, but Saul’s persecution scattered this church to the four winds. Local sentiments cast a shadow of negativity over the Christians who remained in the area, and they became very unpopular in the media. Quite a change from the esteem they enjoyed earlier in their history (Acts 5:13). The waves of economic ruin and loss of jobs thrashed this boat load of Christians against the rocks leaving some families in deep water and financial shambles. Poverty set in like a New England fog to chill the bones and sap vital energy from souls struggling for existence. It was a terrible time for these people.

HEROD AGRIPPA

Herod Agrippa, the playboy wonder, was king at this time. He began a campaign of persecution to destroy the church in Jerusalem. Born in 10 B.C., Herod was the son of Aristobulus and the grandson of infamous Herod the Great. Aristobulus was killed by his father in 10 B.C. This caused Caesar Augustus to say he would rather be Herod’s pig than one of Herod’s sons. Agrippa’s grandmother was Mariame, a Hasmonean princess. Herod Agrippa was educated in Rome with his boyhood friends, Caligula and Gaius (later Roman Emperors). Agrippa lived a life of luxury—a sort of playboy life in decadent Rome. At one time, he was arrested by Tiberias for criticizing the Emperor. When Tiberias died in 37 A.D., Agrippa’s fortunes improved. Caligula or Gaius appointed Agrippa over northeast Palestine, the region of Galilee and Perea, and gave him the title “king” which is why he is known as King Herod Agrippa (41-44 BC).

THE DEATH OF JAMES

Like his grandfather, Agrippa was half-Jew and half-Idumean. A slick politician, Agrippa was loyal to Rome, but he practiced a form of Judaism in order to pacify the Jews. Learning that the leading Jews were disgruntled with the sect of Christianity because of their extension into the Gentile community, Herod Agrippa had James, the brother of John, arrested, imprisoned, and put to death. It is here that our story begins: “Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.” (Acts 12:1).

James was the first apostle among the twelve to be put to death. Notice the ease in which Agrippa is able to find James to arrest him and to behead the apostle. There appears to be no resistance, no struggle, no protest. The affair was a simple, quick, unjust execution of a good man by an evil king.

The church will always experience resistance to its message. One of Satan’s strategies to cripple God’s work is to target church leaders for destruction: “Smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered” (Zechariah 13:7).

THE ARREST OF PETER

When Herod took a poll and learned that he gained points for executing James, he followed suit and arrested Peter, the leading pastor of the sect. The arrest took place during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, an eight-day feast at the time of Passover. Apparently, Peter was kept in prison during this time. Agrippa planned to conduct a mock trial at the conclusion of the feast, trump up charges against Peter for breaking some statutory law, condemn him, and then put him to death. Herod knew this would please the leaders of the Jews and that his popularity would rise in the polls.

To assure results, Agrippa placed Peter in prison, possibly Fortress Antonio. Peter was guarded by four squads of soldiers, that is sixteen trained Roman commandos. Two were chained to Peter, one guarded Peter’s cell door, and the other guarded the main prison gate. Rotating shifts, four soldiers would stand guard three hours at a time, twice a day.

Peter knew he was marked for martyrdom. The Lord predicted his death (John 21). Imagine Peter’s thoughts while he was chained between these two soldiers contemplating his death. He must have thought, “This is it!” Things seemed so final.

The Church Asleep

Notice that when James was arrested, the church did not protest. They did not march in the streets. They did not send a letter to remonstrate against the arrest. They did not pray! No prayer, no petitions, no pleadings went up to the throne of God on behalf of James. Perhaps, they were so wrapped up in personal problems they did not pray. Maybe they were spiritually asleep and lethargic, or possibly they did not discern the animus residing within the heart of Herod Agrippa. Whatever reason, they did not pray.

We learn a truth: People are often oblivious to the struggles of their leaders. Who would have ever guessed that Spurgeon suffered from depression because of the criticism of jealous contemporaries? Who among the saints knew the fears that shredded the soul of Adoniram Judson. Leaders usually do not hang out their dirty laundry in public. We need to understand that leaders are not immune to the struggles of humanity. Some are eaten up with the fear of rejection, some with the fear of criticism, and some with the fear of poverty. We need to pray much for our leaders.

THE PRAYING CHURCH

Notice the difference between the arraignment of Peter from James: “So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying” (12:5).

THE POWERFUL RESULTS OF PRAYER

Powerful Deliverance: On the eve of Peter’s execution, an angel came to Peter’s aid. While the soldiers were in a deep sleep, the angel unlocked Peter’s chains, ordered him to get dressed, and the two of them busted out of prison. Scurrying through the streets, Peter arrived at the house of Mary, the mother of John, and reported the good news. Shortly, thereafter, Peter went underground.

Powerful Joy: When Peter arrived at Mary’s house and knocked at the door, Rhoda was “overjoyed.” Leaving Peter outside, she raced to tell the praying saints the good news. Prayer results in joy. Some of us can testify that we have come discouraged to many a prayer meeting, but whoever leaves in the same state?

Powerful Judgment: When Herod heard of Peter’s escape, he investigated the incident and ordered the guards to be executed.

Later, Herod attended a meeting in Caesarea to entertain a petition by Blastus from Tyre and Sidon. Apparently, the people of Tyre and Sidon offended Herod. Dependent upon the grain crop from Judea, the people of Tyre and Sidon needed to make amends and appealed to Herod at Caesarea through their agent Blastus. At the

forum, Herod wore his silver robe, acted pompously, and flaunted his royal power in an arrogant, boisterous manner. When people attributed deity to Agrippa, he lapped up the praise like a starving dog. But, his arrogance ascended to heaven like odors from an open sewer, and an angel of judgment was dispatched to end his life. Herod died suddenly. Josephus tells us that he was seized in the stomach with a severe pain and died within days.

Powerful Evangelism: The Scripture tells us that “the Word of God continued to increase and spread” (12:24). This is God’s way of telling us that the Christians began to proclaim the gospel and that many more people placed their faith in Christ. The Greek verbs “increase” and “spread” are imperfect verbs indicating that this harvest was not a spurious, one-time event, but a continuous on-going revival in the region.

HOW TO PRAY POWERFULLY

We must ask the question, “How can we pray and see the mighty power of God revealed?”

Pray rebelliously: Prayer is ultimately an insurrection against the status quo. Prayer happens because people refuse to accept the world as it is. Prayer is an organized rebellion against evil, meanness, injustice, immorality, sin, transgression, and wickedness of the age.

Pray earnestly: The word “earnest” (ἤν ἐκτενῶς) is an adverb describing the kind of prayer that was offered. The word “earnest” is translated “deeply” (NIV) in 1 Peter 1:22). The word is used to describe the Lord’s agony and blood sweat in Luke 22:44. In Jonah’s discourse to the wicked city of Ninevah, he advised them to put on sackcloth and pray “mightily to God.” The word “mighty” (LXX) is our word “earnest.”

Pray continually: The Greek verb for prayer is a present participle and it communicates that this church prayed continuously during Peter’s arraignment. Immediately, when the church heard that Peter was imprisoned, they knew what to do. They fell on their knees and prayed for Peter. They did not stop praying until Peter was out of jail.

God is not calling us to pray 24 hours a day for the rest of our lives. But, I believe there will be seasons when we need to be on our knees for times of sustained prayer.

Pray publicly: By praying continuously, we do not mean that every individual prayed 24 hours a day for eight days, but that the church organized itself in a way that prayer was going up continuously because of the crisis. This was public prayer, group

prayer, and church prayer. It was the power of collective prayer that resulted in Peter's release, and it was the lack of public prayer that resulted in the death of James.

Interestingly, no apostle was present at these prayer meetings. Individual church members initiated the prayer. Why is it that church members tend to wait till leaders in the church organize prayer meetings? I want to go on record to say that you never need my permission to start a prayer meeting.

Pray specifically: Note that this church prayed earnestly "for him" (Acts 12:5). They did not simply pray that God would bless the world, but they that Peter would be delivered from certain death. Their prayer was specific; that is, they argued with particularity Peter's plight before Him Who can reverse the inevitable. When praying, we need to narrow our focus. Avoid shotgun prayer. Send a silver bullet.

Pray sacrificially: Apparently, Peter was delivered in the middle of the night. People were losing sleep during this time of intercession. This kind of prayer is costly, but it purchased Peter's deliverance.

Pray weakly: When Rhoda sprinted to tell the rest of the saints that Peter was at the door, they thought she was out of her mind (12:15). All were shocked by Peter's arrival. We kind of laugh at this incident, but that is exactly how we would have responded. These are our kind of people. God allowed us to see the "humanness" of these people so we might know that powerful praying does not come from perfect people. You see, our prayers are a mixture of faith and unbelief, of hope and despair, of heaven and of earth. I wish it were otherwise. But it isn't. We pray weakly, that is, we pray to an Almighty God as frail saints struggling to believe God for the impossible. Instead of pretending to be pit warriors for God, I think it is best to argue our weakness. David confessed, "I am poor and needy, come quickly to me, O God" (Psalm 70:5). In other words, don't let the consciousness of your humanity keep you from joining the saints at a prayer meeting.

In conclusion, we have examined an historical crisis that threatened the prosperity of the gospel. If Satan can destroy leaders, he can destroy a church. These saints were not perfect people, but they responded properly to a local crisis and reversed the course of history.

As a church, we will constantly be battling impotence, tiredness, weakness, and fruitlessness. Vision will grow dim. Programs will die. Laborers will quit. Energy will wind down. How do we overcome the law of entropy? The solution is to rebel and to be

a praying church. Prayer is not part of our work; it is our work. We can do much for God after we have prayed, but we cannot do much for God until we have prayed.

Let us be a praying church!

When a Family Prays

By Brian Lynch



You can have more power in prayer by continuously praying for deep seated problems in the family.

Do you believe in miracles? I do! God recently performed a miracle in my family.

I have witnessed the miracle of reconciliation between Mom and Dad who were separated for more than twenty years.

My parents were married on June 30, 1956. They have 3 sons: Frank, Kevin and me; and 5 daughters: Maureen, Kathleen, Kelley, Colleen, Erin. In 1964, when I was two, we moved from Philadelphia to the small southwestern town of Chandler, Arizona.

A FAMILY DIVIDED

In the early eighties, Dad returned to Philadelphia to take care of his dying mother, whose last wish was for him to care for his older sister, Marianne. Dad remained there and performed that task faithfully for 20 years. Mom stayed in Arizona, and the kids continued with school, work and other activities.

AN ANSWERED PRAYER

Through those years, my family fervently prayed for Mom and Dad to be reunited. On my Dad's 65th birthday, God began answering those prayers! For his special day, Mom wrote Dad a love letter urging him to grab a rocking chair and to live out the rest of his days with her in Arizona! In spite of Dad's polite refusal to accept her offer, Mom did not give up hope. And, their 45th anniversary was also approaching.

Bad News

In October, Dad's older sister Marianne traveled to Phoenix for a visit. At the end of her stay, on the way to the airport, she informed Mom that Dad had advanced prostate cancer. Incredibly, God's mercy had allowed Mom to reach out to Dad in love long before she found out that he was dying! He could not mistake her motive.

When I received the news that Dad had been diagnosed with cancer four years earlier, I called my pastor, Brooky Stockton. I told him that I was angry with Dad because he had known about the cancer for years and had not told any of us. Pastor

Stockton instructed me, "You need to honor your dad and tell him how much you love him." I said, "Pastor, you don't understand, I'm so angry with him for not sharing this with me I could just spit." He repeated: "You need to honor your dad and tell him how much you love him." Didn't he know how mad I was? I realized that the command to 'Honor thy father and thy mother' is not conditioned on whether I feel they deserve it at the time.

I reluctantly obeyed and called my dad. We enjoyed the most wonderful visit of our lives. With God's love in my heart, I was able to say, "I love you, Dad."

GOD'S TIMING

God's timing is interesting. Before I learned Dad had cancer, I was looking at a career change. After prayerful consideration, God directed me to keep my present work. Had I changed employment, I would have been consumed by the new job and would not have been able to take vacation time to spend with my Dad. Isn't God good?

My Mom called Dad that week and urged him to come to Arizona and to enjoy his family! In January (02), Dad made the trip to Phoenix. He and Mom spent almost every moment of that week together. I brought my wife and two sons (Gavin and Isaiah) to this family reunion. Dad had never seen his grandson, Isaiah, who was then two and a half years old. We felt so fortunate to have that week together with him and to treasure up those memories. Isaiah continues to pray every night that 'Papa Tom get all better!' Oh, how God treasures up those sweet prayers!

DIFFICULT TIMES

Dad did not commit to the "rocking chair retirement adventure," but had a wonderful time in Phoenix with his family. But, at that time, Dad began to experience severe back pain. Upon his return to Philadelphia, he discovered that the cancer had metastasized to his back. The Doctors advised Dad to receive a series of 10 targeted radiation treatments. This regiment created some complications which led to emergency surgery.

While Dad was hospitalized, a business opportunity materialized back east. I arranged the short flight to Philadelphia to coincide with the end of my trip. When I arrived, I learned that Dad was transferred to the Artman Nursing Home to recover from the surgery. The despair in that place was suffocating. Dad was in terrible shape. He could barely speak or eat. I doubted that Dad would ever recover.

Mom booked a flight to Philadelphia to help take care of Dad. When Mom arrived, she looked terrific! But, Dad was slumped in bed and not very concerned with his own appearance. When my spiffy Mom made her entrance into the room, Dad's countenance changed. He sat up, slicked his hair back, and smiled! He said to Mom, "Come over here and let me smell you, doll face!" She spent her time there doing everything she could to cheer and encourage my father. That week, God brought a special blessing into our lives. A Christian orderly named Lawrence had a bright smile and a cute Jamaican accent. He prayed with Mom and my sister Maureen for Dad to be healed.

God seemed to be at work all week. I had the pleasure of getting to know my Uncle Henry and his family better. Uncle Henry poured out his love to Dad and the entire family. He listened carefully and was incredibly generous and loving. Uncle Henry shared with me in secret that my father was very concerned about how I might raise my family. I knew I needed to share with Dad the hope that I have in Christ. I prayed for an opportunity to discuss the gospel with him.

SHARING THE GOSPEL

Before the week was up, God gave me some personal time with my Dad, and I had a chance to share the love of Christ with him. I did not have to tell Dad that I was a sinner. He knew that all too well. I spoke with him how sin separates us from God, and how God has provided salvation for us through the person and work of Christ. I wanted him to know that nothing we do can make us right with God. Everything has already been done for us through the cross. We must simply believe that and trust Him. For 45 minutes my Dad and I talked. As Dad and I talked about God's love, Mom sat nearby, and a dying Jewish man listened in the bed next to Dad. I assured my father, that if I died that day, I would be waiting for him at the gates of heaven. My Dad said with tears of joy, "You're a good man, son." Grateful for the precious time we'd spent together, I left to return home.

DAD'S DYING HOURS

Shortly thereafter, Dad's health deteriorated. My father went 13 days without food and almost 3 days without water, Mom knew Dad was near death. My sister Maureen called the family and urged all of us to come and to say our goodbyes.

I had accumulated enough frequent flyer miles in my business travels to fly my 3 younger sisters across the country. Because I had just seen my father and expressed my love to him, I was not inclined to go. But, my wife encouraged me to make the trip.

When I arrived at the airport in Philadelphia, I called the nursing home. Dad was down to 8 breaths a minute. The family urged me not to wait for my brother Kevin and my sister Kathleen to arrive at the airport, but to come immediately. Concerned that my father might die at any moment, I rushed to the nursing home.

THE PRAYER FOR MY DYING DAD

When I arrived, the family hovered around my dying Dad and tearfully waited for him to pass into eternity. Dad was pale, and struggled for breath. Mom looked at me and said, "We waited for you to pray, Son!" I searched my heart for the right words. I leaned over the bed and whispered, "Dad we're going to pray Gavin's favorite psalm, Psalm 23." As I prayed, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me," everyone in the room knew we were in that valley. But, a strange sensation came over me. Feeling God's presence, I prayed silently that God would take my Dad peacefully to his heavenly home.

God's Stunning Answer to Prayer

The night wore on and we all were travel-weary and hungry. Uncle Henry arrived with some pizza for us. As we sat down to eat, Dad stirred, sat up, and said, "Hey, that smells pretty good. How about a slice!"

The wake we had begun was obviously a little premature! Dad ate some pizza and drank some water. Several days later Dad was feeling well enough to talk. He spoke to Kevin and me about some photos and other items he wanted to give us that were in his bedroom at home. I said, "Just tell me where they are and I'll go get them." But, Dad responded, "No, I want to go get them with you." At that moment, Dad sat up, swung his legs over the side of the bed, and blurted out, "Let's go." My brother Kevin and I stared at each other with that same deer-in-the-headlights look. Not sure what the procedure was in such circumstances, I hurried down to the head nurse and asked, "My dad would like to go visit his home. Can he leave?" The nurse smiled and said, "Sure!"

I called my uncle and informed him that we were going to take Dad on a short trip back to his house. Uncle Henry laughed, "Your dad, God love him." Kevin and I lifted Dad into the wheelchair and headed down the ramp to the car. When we pulled up to his house, Dad said, "Don't bother with the wheelchair, I'll use the walker!" Kevin and I were both thinking the same thing, "Dad is going to collapse and die on the steps leading up to the front door." But, he didn't.

When Dad finished shuffling through several boxes of incredible memories together, he blurted out, "I'm hungry!" At 11:00 PM, the family headed over to Uncle Henry's for Philly cheese steaks. God had given our family the most amazing week of our life! At this point, the wake was postponed indefinitely.

On June 30, 2002, Mom and Dad celebrated their 46th wedding anniversary TOGETHER! This marked the first Mothers' day, Fathers' day, and anniversary Mom and Dad had spent TOGETHER in twenty years! Mom's dream now came true. On July 2, 2002, she and Dad flew from Philly to Phoenix. They now live TOGETHER in their own home!

Smiles, hugs, and laughter now abound in my family. I simply cannot praise God enough for answering our prayers.

MIRACLES can happen when a family prays!

Editor's Note: Brian's dad lived six more months after his miraculous recovery. He lived happily with his wife in Phoenix Arizona until he was taken home to be with the Lord.

Prayer in Jesus' Name

John 14:13

"Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."



You can have more power in prayer by praying thoughtfully in Jesus's Name and authority.

Who doesn't want to have a more effective prayer life? We all do! And, this verse provides one key to effective prayer—prayer offered in the Name of Jesus.

The text begs us to ask, "What does it mean to pray in Jesus' Name?" Does this mean that every prayer that ends with the tag, "In Jesus' Name" has power in heaven? That prayer is a blank check?

First, let's look at what it doesn't mean. There is no magic in just repeating the name "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus" after a prayer. The name "Jesus" is not the pixie dust that creates Wonderland for anyone.

Second, there is no cursory power in pronouncing the name of "Jesus." In Acts 19 some itinerant Jewish exorcists took up the mantra, "I adjure you by the Jesus, whom Paul proclaims" to attempt to cast out an evil spirit with disastrous results. The evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them," (Acts 19:16)

So, then, what does it mean to pray in the Name of Jesus?

To pray in Jesus' name is to embrace his Person;

that is, to accept His unique Person—His hypostasis—that is, that He is truly God and truly man! From the beginning, John informs us that Jesus is the "Word" that "was Theos;" and, that the Word became flesh; that He is the God-man, the unique Son of God, the "only begotten God;" God's Representative to us and our Representative to the Father (John 1:1, 14, 18; 1 Timothy 1:5).

We do not pray to an unknown, undefined deity. We are not called to pray in the name of good man, or great teacher, or unique prophet, but pray in the name of One who is very God of God, and very man among men.

To pray in Jesus' name is to embrace all His titles and appellations as representative of the fullness of His Person.

The name "Jesus" means "savior." In John the Savior is called "the Word," "Theos" (1:1), "the Creator" (1:3), "the Lamb of God" (1:29), "the Son of God" (1:34), "the Messiah" (1:41), the "King of Israel" (1:49), the "Serpent lifted up on the cross" (3:14), One equal with the Father (5:18-24), "the Bread of Life" (6:35), "the Light of the world" (8:12), "the Good Shepherd" (10:10-11), "the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (14:6), and others.

In the writings of the apostles, Jesus is called "the Lord Jesus Christ," (Romans 1:7), "the Wisdom and Power of God" (1 Corinthians 24), "the Creator" (Colossians 1:15), the "Firstborn of all creation," (1:16) the "Head of the Church," (Colossians 1:18), the "Hypostasis of God" (Hebrews 1:1-3), "the Apostle and High Priest" of our faith (Hebrews 3:1), and many others.

Thus, effective prayer is accomplished by one who has a keen understanding of Who Christ as the gift of God to humanity.

To pray in the Name of Jesus is to acknowledge Him and to utilize Him as the ONLY Mediator between God and man.

Ephesians 2:18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

To pray in Jesus' Name is a statement that we have repented and continue to repent of all our transgressions, that we have embraced the cross of Christ by faith (John 1:12-13; 3:16; 3:36; 5:24; Acts 3:38, 3:19; 17:30; Galatians 3:22; Ephesians 1:19), and that we are committed to a life of obedience to His law-word (John 15:10; Romans 8:4; 13:8; 10:9-10; 1 John 5:1-3).

A requisite for answered prayer is repentance and faith. When we pray in Jesus' Name, we are saying that we are ordinary men with no qualifications to pray other than the fact that we have in the minimum way embraced "repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ: that is, that we are true believers (Acts 20:21).

To pray in Jesus' Name is a claim upon the benefits of His work at Calvary that qualifies us to even utter a prayer.

In the epistles His work at Calvary enables Christians to obtain the blessings of “justification” (Rom. 3:24), “redemption” (Rom. 3:24), “reconciliation” (Rom. 5:10), “holiness” (Rom. 6:22), “adoption” (Rom. 8:16) “intercessory aide” (Rom. 8:27), “forgiveness” (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), “the favor of God” (Rom. 8:31ff), and many others.

When we pray in Jesus’ Name, we are claiming the benefits of His shed blood at Calvary that cleanses sinners and clothes them. It is awareness that He and His accomplishments enable us to knock on Heaven’s door and to be welcome there. We pray as holy men adorned by Him in robes of His righteousness, and not as filthy sinners with no claims upon His throne.

To pray in Jesus’ Name is a bold trust in His sovereignty and the Power of His risen life at the Right Hand of God (Acts 2:32; Eph. 1:19ff).

Praying in Jesus’ Name is a statement that we believe He is not only alive, but stationed at the right hand of the Father reigning over the affairs of men until all his enemies are defeated. We pray to a living Christ, not a crypt; to a risen Lord and Savior, not a dead martyr; to our King and Lord, not to an enemy.

To pray in Jesus’ Name is lying hold of the comfort that the weaknesses of our person and the weakness of our prayers can be overcome by virtue of Who He is and What He has done.

Who among us can pray to the Father without a deep sense of weakness and awareness of screaming sins blasting away in secret condemnation that we are unworthy to call upon God.

It is Jesus and His work that calms the sea. We pray to Jesus Whose acceptance silences the megaphone of condemnation that seeks to drown out His pronouncement “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven” (Matthew 9:2).

When we pray in Jesus’ Name, we approach the Throne of Grace (Hebrews 4:16). We come to a Throne where a rich, sovereign King has the Authority and Power to answer our prayers; and, we approach a “throne of grace” where the flaws of our person, and the weakness our prayers can be over looked. And, it is with this assurance, we pray in the sweet Name of Jesus.

Watching in Prayer

1 Peter 4:7

"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer"



You can have more power in prayer by exercising military discipline in the duty of prayer.

We are given the command "to watch."

The verse is clear, but what did Peter mean by "watch?"

First, there are two imperatives in this text.

The aorist imperative means "to stop" what you are doing and "to start" performing the paramount duty.

The first command is "be sober" which means to be self-controlled and self-restrained; and, in your right mind. Americans are very interested in controlling others and telling them what to do. Here Peter orders us to take charge of our own faculties.

The second command is our word "watch" -- a military exercise wherein captains require guard duty of subordinates. The idea is to be calm and collected -- to be on guard against an enemy attack. Some things in life are very emotional and it's all we can do be reasonable and calm.

The idea using the term "watch" is to be awake and alert. Wake up, the enemy prowls about like a roaring lion (5:8).

Second, the command "to watch" is relevant to "the end of all things."

"The end of all things" could refer to the end of the world (age) as we know it or to matters for those facing end of life decisions.

Whether the Lord comes to us, or we go to be with Him, the end of all things is near.

Thus, this command is relevant to everyone, especially to those finishing up the 4th quarter of their lives. Whether the Lord comes to us, or we go to be with Him, the end of all things is near.

Third, the command is not to pray but to "watch" in prayer.

Watching imposes a duty on Christians to be alert to matters that threaten the fortress of their soul and the heart of the church. Prayer is a means of obtaining the Lord's assistance in that duty (See 1 Corinthians 16:13).

Fourth, the context is one of suffering for Christ in "fiery trials" (1, 12).

In Peter's day, Christians faced the terrors of the tyrannical Roman state.

In America, adversity is not something modern Christians embrace. Consequently, most of us don't know how to suffer well.

Suffering is hard and sensual delights provide temporary relieve from sparring against evil; that is, the stress involved in serious duty has its own temptations. Peter's command is don't sleep. Stay awake.

Fifth, the context is also about the believer's past life when they lived "in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries" (4:3).

When trying to bench press an elephant, the temptation is to give up and to plunge into sensuality, the pleasures of youth, or the luxuries of success.

Sixth, the text calls believers to be alert to the enemy's attacks on the soul.

Whether the attack be doubt about the faith or the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of this life, believers are called to resist, resist, resist. Every stage of life has its challenges to be faithful, and old age is not exempt from the duty of remaining faithful to our Lord.

A lovely, sweet 74 year old woman came into my office when I was the Dean of Men at a Seminary. I asked how I could help her. She responded, "Pray that I will be faithful to the end." I never forgot her unusual request.

Seventh, watching is needed because "the fiery trial" may follow us to the grave.

When that day arrives it will be necessary to "commit the keeping of *our* souls to *him* in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (4:19); and to lay hold of His power Who has "given unto us exceeding great and precious promises" for the journey ahead (2 Peter 1:4).

The Ultimate Objective of All Prayers

Colossians 4:12

Colossians 2:8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Colossians 4:12 Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand **perfect and complete in all the will of God.**



You can be more effective at praying knowing the ultimate objective of all prayers.

The ultimate objective of all intercessory prayer should be that the object of prayer stands perfect and complete in the will of God – not in the will of feminists or socialists, but in the will of God.

The Colossian church experience a tidal wave of Greek philosophies called “vain deceit,” “tradition of men,” and “rudiments of the world” (2:8). We know these intellectual movements as Platonic Gnosticism, Epicureanism, Stoicism, Socratic Reasoning, Greek Mysticism, Aristotelian metaphysics, et. al.

Each of these philosophies sought to increase their following. And, many church members were knocked off their feet by these promoters.

Epaphras agonized in prayer for the church that each member would be able to stand firm **in the will of God** against –

- the will of Platonism
- the will of Epicurians
- and, the will of the Gnostics.

Likewise in modern times. There are popular intellectual movements that want you to follow their will for humanity. But, the Spirit seeks to help **us stand in the will of God.**

- Not the will of evolutionists,
- Not the will of the democrats or republicans.

- Not the will of the UN's 2030 Agenda,
- Not the will of the Medical Doctors promoting meds and vaccines,
- Not the will of the LGBT Community,
- Not the will woke, permissive college professors,
- Not the will the Gender Bender Movement,
- Not the will of the DOJ, IRS, CIA, or FBI,
- Not the will of the WEF (World Economic Forum)
- Not the will of pop psychologists,
- Not the will of Hollywood,
- Not the will of pornographers.
- Not the will of Silicon Valley or Google,
- Not the will of the California Legislature,
- Not the will of CNN,
- Not the will of some cult leader,

Notice the text again: “. . . , that ye may **stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.**” The word “stand” is a passive implying that the church needed to receive strength from above to stay on their feet. The objective is “to stand.” Sometimes it’s all a man can do is to stand and to keep one’s footing in a tidal wave of ideas trying to capture him and carry him out into the sea of apostasy.

Note the apostle wanted the Colossians to be “perfect” and “complete” in the will of God. This is Paul’s way of saying he wanted the church to know the height, width, and breadth of God’s will. Not just to know it, but to be captivated by and fully devoted to the will of God.

Every relevant command in the Bible expresses the Will of God for men. They need only to stand in the truth and not be swept off their feet by every wind of doctrine blowing through society.

Wrestling with God

Genesis 32

Colossians 4:12 Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand **perfect and complete in all the will of God.**

Genesis 32:24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.



You can have answered prayer, but sometimes you have to wrestle for it.

Notice in the Colossians 4:12 passage that Epaphras labored fervently for the Colossian Church in prayer. The phrase “laboring fervently” comes from the Greek participle *agonizomenos*. We get the English term “agonize” from this word-- a word that refers to “mental anguish.”

This raises the question, “What do you want and how bad to you want it.”

There are times when God only releases His blessing upon us after a season of intense longing and wrestling with Him (Jon Bloom).

In Genesis 32, Jacob was on his way back home to Canaan with his two wives and many sons after a twenty year sojourn in Paddan-aram. Behind him was angry Uncle Laban; in front of him was angry brother Esau. Jacob was scared to death, because his disaffected brother was coming to meet him — with four hundred armed men (Genesis 32:6). This was not a happy welcome party; it was a cavalry of soldiers.

Jacob acted quickly to save his family from what appeared to be an revenging army ordered to murder him. He divided his small tribe into two camps to see which way Esau would go . . . and he stood in the middle ready to join the un-attacked party.

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day (Genesis 32:24). What do you see?

Championship Wrestling in Scripture

Ring Side Seats

I was given a ticket to a championship bout at Jabbok Stadium. I entered through Genesis gate and searched for section 32, row 24. When I arrived, I saw clouds of

witnesses. I sat between two camps of angels in the middle of Mahanaim in order to watch a contest between two heavy weights. It was more exciting than two warriors contending for the Olympic gold or the championship belt of the WWF. It was more thrilling than a match between Hulk Hogan and the Rock; between the slamming power of the Undertaker and raw, bone-crushing holds of the Terminator.

The first contestant was the Angel of the Covenant. He held many titles: King of kings, Lord of lords, Lion of Judah, Lamb of God, Hound of Heaven, and the Heavenly Hercules. He was the undefeated, undisputed Hero of Eternity. The second contestant was a mortal man, Earth's champion. He also had many titles: Jacob, the Heel Grabber; the Wily Weasel from the Wilderness of Beersheba; and the Grand Slam from Padan Aram. He defeated Esau, the cunning hunter from southern Canaan and Fast Fingers Laban from Mesopotamia. He was a "plain man," that is, an upright man, but he was more evasive than Big Foot and had all the razzle-dazzle of Jake the Snake.

I have been a contestant in this same stadium on several occasions. But, I have weak knees and a weak will and my diet consist of chocolate éclairs and Devil delights. Maybe, that is why I have never made it past the first round. I decided to study the wrestling moves of these two champions to improve my own wrestling skills.

This was a great battle--a street brawl—a high stakes alley fight with war whoops, head bangers, and the tombstone piledriver. The Hercules of Heaven possessed joint-wrenching strength and specialized in power slams. The Wilderness Weasel had a reputation for his many tricks. He was especially skilled in the heal-grabbing chokeslam.

When the Sun went down, under the cover of darkness, I saw what looked like a Lion stirring across the gully stalking his prey. His piercing eyes locked on to the Wilderness Weasel. Quietly and patiently He moved toward his quarry. Jacob looked tired that night and seemed unaware of the presence of the angelic Stalker. When the Lion lunged, Jacob jumped with lightening like speed to evade capture. All night long, the Weasel sprinted from tree-to-tree, rock-to-rock, and bush-to-bush. Amazingly, he managed to elude the take down maneuvers of the Heavenly gladiator.

I learned my first lesson that night. The Angelic Lion was the initiator in the contest. He was the Great Shepherd in search of lost sheep . . . the abandoned Father longing to find His lost son . . . a sniffing Heavenly Hound in search of missing persons. He did not give up. He wanted something from the Heel Grabber, but I could not tell what it was.

My second observation was that the Lion worked under the cover of darkness. He seeks men who are alone and vulnerable. "His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chronicles 16:9). I thought to myself that if men want to avoid capture, all they need to do is turn on the radio in the morning and the T.V. at night. Noise and busyness frightens lions.

I also learned something about men from the Beersheba Wrestler. Jacob was desperate to retain control of his own life. He was particularly adroit at performing the dance of the seven veils in order to hide from the piercing eyes of this Celestial Lion. He had a lot of flimflam, snake oil, and hocus-pocus. When it comes to Lordship, men can be more elusive than a Madagascar lizard.

I learned that this Stalker of Souls does not want a part of me, but all of me. He does not want an hour on Sunday, but every minute of every hour of every day of every week. Am I holding back something from God? He will contend until He gets what he wants from me.

The contest lasted all night. The Lion pursued. The weasel fled. Dust flew. Like a teeny-bopper doing the jitter bug across the dance floor, Jacob was a master of the zigzag shuffle. It seemed like a stalemate. When the Lion saw that the Wilderness Weasel would not yield, He employed his famous powerbomb, extended his paw, and with a Lamb's touch dislocated Jacob's hip. The scream thundered through the auditorium. Jacob collapsed to the ground like a fainting goat. Pain rippled across his face. Sweat poured from his brow. Ditches of fear wrinkled across his forehead.

I learned another lesson. God's champion has powerbombs that can totally disable a man. Jacob limped. Moses' speech failed. Gideon lost 31,700 soldiers. David's son died. Paul landed on his back in a thorn bush. He knows every man's weak spot.

It hurt me to see Earth's Champion wreathing in pain and groveling in the dust. Slowly, Jacob lifted up his head and in one final attempt to win the match threw a double heel lock on the right ankle of the Angel. He was trapped. The Lion couldn't move. He growled out an order, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." The Heal Gripper refused to release his clutch and blurted out, "I will not let you go except you bless me."

It was here I learned the gravity of this contest. Religion is not entertainment, but mortal combat. The Sun was coming up. No man can see God and live. It was do or die for Earth's champion. I paused to wonder who would yield, the Lion or the Weasel?

Would the Angel scream “Uncle!” or would the Weasel die? Would the Angel win the man or would the Weasel receive his blessing? Who would prevail?

I began to understand the strategy of the Lion. Jacob’s wound increased his desire to obtain the Angel’s blessing. The Lion’s strength was made perfect in the Weasel’s weakness. “That is my problem,” I thought. “I do not crave God enough.” Instead of rivers of desire, I have only trickles of interest. Instead of storm clouds of passion, I only have gusts of concerns. Instead of galaxies of love, I spit out small asteroids of affection. He wants to bless me more than I want to be blessed. Must I be wounded before I desire Him more?

The battle raged. The Heel Grabber, a mortal man, had a death grip on the Lion’s ankle. Who would prevail in this bone-crushing contest—God or man?

As the first flickers of light kissed the mountain tops of Mahanaim, in the final seconds of the final round, the Ringmaster rushed into the ring of combat to pronounce a winner. Darkness and dust clogged the morning air. I could barely see the contestants. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the Lion slip away into the darkness with a grin on His face. Exhausted, Jacob limped to the center of the ring. Silence settled on Jabbok Stadium. Then, the angels cheered and the stadium shook with shouts and screams. I saw the inscription “Isra-el” engraved in gold and I heard the Ringmaster shout, “for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.” Jacob’s hand was lifted high and the Heel Grabber was presented with the champion’s belt.

Going Pro Jacob Received a New Name

I could hardly believe my ears. The Weasel received a new title, “Israel.” The word means “prince with God.” It is one thing to prevail over men, but God? What did it all mean, I mused?

The name “Jacob” means “heel grabber” or “contender.” Some translated the name as “supplanter” meaning a “humble suppliant.” Jacob is described as a “plain” man (Genesis 25:27). The Hebrew word “plain” (tam) is translated “integrity” (Genesis 20:5), “perfect” (Job 1:1), or “upright” (Proverbs 10:9) In comparison to his popular, profane, fornicating brother, Jacob was an honest, hardworking, upright man. His reputation as a total deceiver or cheat is undeserved. Bible preachers ought to beware of maligning a man whom God honors.

Jacob’s name was changed to Isra-el.

“El” in Hebrew is the word for God. It is used twice in this passage; that is, Jacob wrestled with God.

"for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." The word "power" (sa-rah) means "prevail or contend or have power." The word sa-rah is also translated "princess or ruler." It also means "strength or ability" (Hosea 12:3).

Jacob is also called "Jeshurun" in Isaiah 44:1-2. Jeshurun means "upright one" or "blessed one." Albright says the root comes Arabic and can be translated "healing." The Arabic word for healer is ash-shafi. Further, the Hebrew word for honesty is ya-shar, the root word for Jesuhrun (yasar-oon), depicting someone who is straight, right, straightforward, direct, and upright, and straightforwardness toward man.

The Hebrew word for Israel is "Yisra-el." The root of "yisra" is "sar," which means to grapple with. "El" refers to a godly being, namely the Angel of the Lord in this context. Thus, Yisrael means, "the one who grappled with God, " the one who wrestled with [and defeated] the angel -- a contrast to Esau/Edom, the person/nation who represented all that was ungodly and wrong in the world] (Quora).

It seems that Jacob's name was changed to Israel to imply "Contender with God." Hosea 12 reinforces this interpretation. In his grace, God took a good man that everyone abused and exalted him to sit on a throne beside Him.

The word Israel is made up of a verb and a nominative noun, Isra-el. In Daniel, the name Dan-iel means "God judges;" and in "Ezekiel" the name Ezeki-el means "God is my strength." Thus, "Israel" implies that "God contends," "God prevails," or "God rules."

In the jussive (a strong coaxing, mild command), Israel may mean "Let God heal." In the Genesis 32 account, the benefit of being named "Israel" is that in this wrestling match God wounded Jacob physically but healed Jacob spiritually. It was the Lion who took the initiative in this contest. It was the Lion's desire to bless all along. It was the Lion's grace that enabled Jacob to prevail. But, he could not bless until Jacob yielded to His rule and threw himself at the Lion's feet and grabbed Him with all his might. The Lion won, but so did Earth's champion. The King of beasts got his man. Jacob obtained his blessing. Stunned at his own victory, Jacob named the place "Penuel," "the face of God."

In Hebrew, the word "Israel" begins with a yod, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet; and, it ends with the largest letter in the Hebrew alphabet a lamed). The Torah begins with "In the beginning" and the Book of Exodus begins with "Now these are the names of the children of Israel." In Genesis, Israel was a single man; In Deuteronomy Israel was a nation.

Likewise, the first step toward spiritual healing begins when one sees himself poor in spirit; that is the yod becomes a lamed when one humbles himself and lays hold of Heaven's Lion (Matthew 5:3).

Ultimately, the name "Israel" belongs to Jacob's greater son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the True Israel, the True Vine who was wounded at Calvary so you and I might receive the blessing of eternal life. Victorious over death, He rose to be seated at the right hand of God until all things are put under His feet (Acts 2:34-36; 1 Corinthians 15:25). Those who believe in Christ are united to Him and join the messianic community, are pronounced Overcomers (1 John 5:4), and the New "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16).

Lessons from the Match

Now I understood the meaning of the match. Every Christian can make the Lion purr when he strokes him by faith. If only men will stop running and learn the Heel Grabber's ankle lock, they too can be eternally blessed. They can contend with God and prevail. But, most do not desire Him enough. They are afraid to be alone at night with the Lion. Will they have to limp before they cling?

How about you? Have you been playing Escape and Evasion with God? Why not yield your soul to him and be saved? The name "Israel" can mean "right with God." If you want to enter the Lion's kingdom, you must humble yourself and trust Him now. Stop running and yield your heart to him. Those who believe are declared "right with God" (Romans 5:4).

Do you belong to the Lion? Do you have any locked closets which He is not allowed to enter? Maybe he wants total control over your life. He has invested in you and seeks a return on His investment. Why not give him the key to your time, talents, and money. He will not be happy until His rule extends to all that you have and all that you are? Lion kings rule. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Do you have a need, a prayer, a deep longing? Maybe you need to be more persistent. Get alone. Wrestle with God in prayer. Throw a double heel lock on His ankle and don't let him go until you receive the blessing you seek. Maybe your problem is that you do not desire God enough? Persist. Pray it through. You can make the Lion purr when you stroke Him by faith: "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, and stopped the mouths of lions . . ." (Hebrews 11:33).

If not already, you will one day be in Jabbok Stadium in a duel with the Heavenly Wrestler? Do you know how to execute a double heel lock?

The point of this passage is that great things come out of wrestling with God and that something can only happen when one agonizes in prayer that they or others might be made perfect and complete in the will of God.

Better yet, pray in Jesus' name. He entered the contest and won the battle for you at Calvary. Rest in His work on your behalf.

Stop Praying for Politicians

Jeremiah 7:16

"Therefore **pray not** thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me (for their welfare): for I will not hear thee" (Jeremiah 7:16).



You can have more power in prayer when you learn to not waste time praying for politicians.

Should Christians pray for their country?

Preachers usually say "Yes" and then quote 2 Chronicles 7:14 or 2 Timothy 2:1-4. (See Lifetime Theology); Franklyn Graham, Robert Jeffress)

But, the book of Jeremiah says, "No." There is a time to stop praying for apostate, secular leaders.

With the accession of Jehoiakim (609-508 BC) to the throne all hope of averting the ruin of the country had passed away.

Jeremiah preached to pilgrims coming to Jerusalem on fast day (probably Rosh Hashanah or another fast day).

There comes a time in the course of politics when government becomes so iniquitous that politicians forfeit the right to honor and respect, the blessing of the prayers of God's people, and the support of the people through taxation.

There was a day in the history of Israel that God commanded Jeremiah to **STOP PRAYING FOR POLITICIANS and to CONFRONT THE REBELS.**

Politicians need confrontation when they . . .

(1) Practice deception (7:8): "Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit."

Consider how modern politicians practice deception which include lies, slander, defamation, sophistication, utopianism, betrayal, falsehood, and fraud.

John Whitehead called the United States and "Empire of Lies."

"Who needs direct repression," asked philosopher Slavoj Zizek, "when

one can convince the chicken to walk freely into the slaughterhouse?"

How can God bless a nation with a Congress (a session of baboons, apes, and primates) and their sycophant media that mass-produce an assembly line of lies, distortion, deceit, propaganda, slander, falsehood, fiction, myths, fraud, defamation, spin, and fake news?

(2) Practice theft (7:9): "... you steal ..."

Consider how modern politicians steal, take bribes, and lay on the people a burdensome system of taxation for sordid gain that transfers wealth from the people to the State.

[Q: How did Hillary Clinton, a senator and later Secretary of State, become worth \$240,000,000? (2017)]

How can God bless a nation with a lusty, covetous government that defrauds, deprives, and dupes the people of their wealth in the form of taxation: food taxes, fuel taxes, income taxes, capital gains taxes, Medicare taxes, health care taxes, phone taxes, shoe taxes, court fines, disposal fees, dog licenses, fishing licenses, driving licenses, environmental fees, camping fees, estate taxes, food and beverages licenses, franchise business taxes, garbage taxes, gift taxes, gun ownership permits, ammunition taxes, inspection fees, property taxes, car license taxes, interest taxes, capital gains taxes, cigarette taxes, beer and wine taxes, corporate taxes, school taxes, unemployment taxes, parking meter taxes, passport fees, professional license fees, building fees, sales taxes, toll booth taxes, self-employment taxes, social security taxes, state park entrance fees, telephone taxes, traffic fines, utility taxes, waste management taxes, water rights fees, water usage fees, zoning permits, and park on the side of the road fees.

(3) Practice murder (7:9): "... murder ..."

Politicians often practice the politics of destruction. The weapon of choice among them is slander and defamation . . . and majority can't resist empowering pregnant women to kill baby boys and girls.

Consider how modern politicians are involved in murder, abortion, infanticide, assassinations, legislation for "assisted suicide," war, and slander of opponents with the intent of destroying their opponents reputation, business, and even their life.

[Example: Consider how the media and other congressmen continued to slander President Trump even after investigator Robert Mueller and 18 professional prosecutors reported there was no evidence of collusion (2016-2019)]

How can God bless America when politicians and its elected leaders are professional accusers, slanderers, and spinsters?

How can God bless imperialist United States that has offensively attacked dozens of countries to shed blood and cause mayhem? Don't Christians believe in "blessed are the peacemakers?"

(4) Practice sexual immorality (7:9): " . . . and commit adultery."

Consider how politicians engage in fornication, adultery, sexual promiscuity, Sodomy, lesbianism, and other forms of sexual immorality. Many of America's presidents support the promotion of LGBTQ perversions and the demoralization of America: Bill Clinton, George Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump.

Since the 1990's, Congress has paid out \$17 million to settle sexual assault claims against 260 member of congress according to CNN.

All this irresponsible sexual behavior increases social decay: STD, teen pregnancy, abortion, divorce, high taxes, and the destruction of the family.

How can God bless a president or nation that applauds abominations that carried ancient civilizations into graveyard of nations (Romans 1:32)?

(5) Practice oath breaking (7:10): " . . . and swear falsely, . . ."

Consider how modern politicians can no longer be trusted to keep their word, promises, or oaths of office. Many seem more devoted to illegal aliens, foreigners, and UN internationalists than to America and its limited constitutional powers.

How can the LORD bless America when its politicians are famous for breaking oaths, treaties, covenants, contracts, and bonds?

(6) Practice of idolatry (7:10): " . . . and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not."

Having rejected distinctive principles of the theocracy, and Jehoikim being personally a secular man, the maintenance of the YHWH worship was no longer a public priority. Multiculturalism swamped the country like a flood. All religions became equal (Jeremiah 8:4-9:24).

Idolatry involves the adoption an alien law order; to have another Source of law rather than the LORD God; that is, the adoption of permissive statutes of pagan nations that pulls society down into the gutters of hell.

Consider how modern politicians practice idolatry, paganism, nature-based spirituality, polytheism, multiculturalism, statist-Baalism, utopianism, Satanism, and the practices of mother-goddess worship, Islam, and eastern mysticism opposed to law of the LORD God. People no longer speak of the Creator; rather, school teachers affectionately refer to "Mother Nature" with cultic devotion.

How can God bless a nation where people practice idolatry, tattooing, "fornication (porneia), uncleanness (dirty deeds), inordinate affection (lustful passion), evil concupiscence (desire for the forbidden), and covetousness (greed, fraud), which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5)?

(7) Practice of fraud (7:11): "... a den of robbers."

Consider how modern politicians rob people through taxation, wealth redistribution, inflation, printing of paper money, and usury. Many become rich practicing bribocracy and taking hush money, reimbursements, graft, gratuities, kickbacks, and perks, in some "pay to play" scheme.

How can God bless a nation that has the best politicians money can buy?

(8) Practicing usurpation feminism (7:18):

"The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead *their* dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger."

Consider how women have moved out of the home into the work place and politics; how feminazis play the victim; how the nations have exalted women to the status of deity; how they have led the whole world into the gender-bender swamp.

There is an on going feminist takeover of society. Politicians everywhere are bowing to feminine weaknesses, emotionalism, and deception. Society has shifted the epicenter of concern to Mother Nature, Queen of Heaven, Mother Earth, fanny studies, gender-bender choices, and riot grrrls.

Kara King: "Our weapon is sex. Our vaginas, breasts, hips, legs, and our asses are to men what emotions are to us. Sex is their greatest weakness.

"I'm tough, I'm ambitious, and I know exactly what I want. If that makes me a bitch, okay." — Madonna

"The thing women have yet to learn is nobody gives you power. You just take it." — Roseanne Barr

"I love to see a young girl go out and grab the world by the lapels. Life's a bitch. You've got to go out and kick ass." — Maya Angelou

What a contrast to the quiet Proverbs 31 woman who is more valuable than a stash of rubies.

How can God bless a nation that rebels against His law-order?

(9) These proud, self-reliant political practices arouse the ire of the Lord God (7:19): " . . . they provoke me to anger?"

We started this study by asking should Christians pray for their country?

We noted that preachers usually say "Yes" and then quote 2 Chronicles 7:14 but fail to call the petitioners to "turn from their wicked ways.'

But, this promise was given early in the history of Israel during the reign of Solomon following the completion of the temple. It is a general promise applicable to a nation building its foundation on obedience to God's law.

But, a lot of history happened between Solomon and Jeremiah.

In Solomon's time, the nation was young and eager to obey; in Jeremiah's time the nation was cemented in its rebellion.

In Solomon's time it was perfectly appropriate to pray for the general welfare of the young nation; in Jeremiah's time, it was completely inappropriate to pray for welfare of the morally bankrupt nation.

There comes a time in the course of politics when government becomes so iniquitous that politicians forfeit the right to honor and respect, the blessing of the prayers of God's people, and the support of the people through taxation.

Moreover, life in America has become a gut-wrenching, soul-sucking, virtue-vanishing, vice-flourishing existence with joy robbers in Congress seeking the total subjugation of the total man to total government.

When society degenerates into a pagan hellhole because of the maddening policies of liberal politicians, the God of the Bible says, **STOP PRAYING for the welfare of politicians** (7:16):

"Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me (for their welfare): *for I will not hear thee*"

NO MORE PRAYER BREAKFASTS FOR POLITICAL LEADERS!!

Why would any Christian go to a prayer breakfast with Muslims, liberals, Jews, Hindus, Mormons, Satanists, statists, and liberals who deny the Word of God yet pray for the president and the country?

There is no "power of prayer," but Christians can lay hold of the Power of the living and true God by praying together!

Pray for repentance, confess sins, intercede for Christian people, pray for courage to stand up and confront the psychopaths, but stop being an undiscerning Christian parroting the meaningless pledges.

One of the luck charms quoted by the people in Jeremiah's day was, "The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD" (7:4) chanted to charm and placate the people. America's mesmerizing chant is "God bless America." But, is God somehow obligated to dump magic pixie dust from heaven on America when Christians carol this statist mantra?

STOP SAYING, "GOD BLESS AMERICA!"

How can a holy God bless a nation given to war, lies, abortion, feminism, Sodomy, lesbianism, transvestitism, asset forfeiture, justice for the rich, gotcha journalism, deep state corruption, voter fraud, redacted history, mandatory masking, theft through foreclosures and oppressive taxation of the People?

"This *is* a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the LORD their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth . . . for the LORD hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath" - Jeremiah 7:28, 29.

Should we ask God to bless America if the nation turns Marxist? Communist? Homosexual? Tyrannical? Imperialistic? A nation of warmongers? A den of robbers?

Don't put your trust in Donald Trump who stated during his RNC acceptance speech, that "[a]s president, I will do everything in my power to protect LGBTQ citizens

from the violence and oppression of a hateful foreign ideology." (2016, May 2019)
America will never be great again until it reverses Roe V. Wade (January 22, 1973) and Obergefell v. Hodges (June 26, 2015) are overturned. A nation that accepts same-sex "marriage" and permits slaughter houses for babies to exist can never be great!!

How can God bless a nation when a Congressmen says, "God is of 'No Concern of This Congress'" (Rep. Ralph Nadler, 2021)?

Is it God's will that a proud, Christ-rejecting, Sodomy-promoting nation succeed?

Doesn't the "D" in American Democracy stands for "Dictatorship?" Attorney John Whitehead thinks so.

"The American people have been treated like enemy combatants, to be spied on, tracked, scanned, frisked, searched, subjected to all manner of intrusions, intimidated, invaded, raided, manhandled, censored, silenced, shot at, locked up, and denied due process."

No, I haven't given up on America, and neither should you. Rather, change your tactics. Stop praying for blessing and start praying for courage to put your boot on the necks of America's real enemies.

You may **CONFRONT THEM, REBUKE THEM, AND CALL UPON GOD TO CURSE THEM**, but you, dear Christian, are *not permitted to pray for God's blessing upon them* (7:2):

"Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD . . . "

". . . If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!" (1 Corinthians 16:22) . . .

"If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:9).

"Imprecations are appeals to the Judge of the earth to play the part of Judge"
(Peter Leithart)

Moreover, in America, the Founding Fathers knew the nation would have difficulties being a virtuous republic and declared the People have a DUTY to overthrow nefarious political leaders by ANY MEANS NECESSARY:

" all experience hath shewn, that *mankind are more disposed to suffer,*

while evils are sufferable, *than to right themselves by abolishing the forms* to which they are accustomed. *But when a long train of abuses and usurpations*, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, *it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.*" (Declaration of Independence).

After Jehoiakim heard Jeremiah's preaching, he was so enraged at this sermon that he would have executed Jeremiah had it not been for the influence of Ahikam (Jeremiah 26).

In 605-586 B.C., the Babylonians invaded Israel, killed a third of the people, and deported the surviving remnant (33%) to Babylon. At the end of their judgment, God healed the nation and never again did they plunge into idolatry. Given a second chance, they returned to rebuild a new nation 70 years later (535 B.C.).

In America, God's judgment looks more like an invasion of millions of unarmed, uneducated Mexicans and Latinos into the country not to deport us, but to deplete and deprive America of its resources.

Praying Against Politicians

Proverbs 28:28

“When the wicked rise, people hide themselves, but when they perish, the righteous increase.”

“May his days be few; may another take his office!” (Psalm 109:8).



You can have more power in prayer and do more good for the nation when you learn to pray correctly against politicians.

We must learn to pray against American politicians WHEN they are hostile to God’s law-order and the Christian faith.

When corrupt politicians rise to power, the righteous have to hide. But, when wicked rulers fall from power, righteous men increase and the land is at peace.

Since the righteous go into hiding during the tenure of evil rulers, and good men increase during righteous administrations, it behooves Christian to pray against self-serving presidents and congressmen. We pray they will be exposed and removed from office.

Christians error when they pray for blessing when ungodly rulers are in power. When Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama shout, "God Bless America," they are asking God to pour out his riches on a nation led by a totalitarian, queer, militarized police State that is in rebellion against His law-order. This is blasphemy. It is like praying, "God, please bless my adulterous affairs with Sally Sue," or "God please bless my plan to murder the cashier at Pedro's Supermarket."

Christians should not be praying for the blessing of the wicked or shout, “God bless America” when it is run by Sodomites, abortionists, and antichrists. The only way God can bless America is to have the wicked removed from office . . . to purge the deep state!

1 Timothy 2:1-2 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

Notice the “we” in the text.

The text does not say we should pray for kings for their benefit, blessing, and success, but for Christians that we might live out our life purpose for the Lord unmolested, undisturbed, and unhampered.

We pray for rulers so that believers can conduct their ministry without being ridiculed, oppressed, plagued, and badgered by encumbering government regulations, codes, taxes, and politically correct new age policies.

We shouldn't even be praying for the salvation of these rulers because these powerful pagans are not permitted by God to rule over God's people to begin with (Deuteronomy 17).

John Jay said it well:

Almost all nations have peace or war at the will and pleasure of rulers whom they do not elect, and who are not always wise or virtuous. Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest, of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers (Justice John Jay, letter to John Murray, 1816).

Everyone but criminals are better off with a Christian ruler. No matter what pagan politician wins an election, voters are bound to be losers.

2 Kings 19:20 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard.

God heard Hezekiah's prayer because he recognized the activity of this wicked king and prayed against the success of this international tyrant. So powerful and so righteous was Hezekiah, the story is recorded three times in the Bible.

Romans 11:2 . . . Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life."

Elijah prayed against Israel because its leaders, Ahab and Jezebel, persecuted Israelites that believed in YHWH and opposed the promotion of Baalism by the same.

Notice he stated the facts: the government killed the prophets, and demolished the practice and symbols of true religion.

When a government targets Christians for prosecution and enacts laws to expunge, terminate, dissolve, suspend, extinguish, disparage, censor, banish, and separate expressions of Christianity like the posting of the Ten Commandments “in public,” then it has joined the rebellion against God’s law-order and must be resisted through prayer and other means.

When a government passes legislation forcing churches to register with the State and organize under 501 c 3 rules, it must be resisted through prayer and any other means.

When a government promotes wickedness like Sodomy, transsexuality, cults like Islam, wholesale abortion, and oppressive taxation, then it must be resisted through prayer or any other means.

When a government acts as a Peeping Tom on its people, collects infinite data on them, and seeks ultimate, unlimited control of people, their property, their wealth, their bank accounts, and biological data, then it must be resisted through prayer or any other means.

Praying that God would bless every American president just because they are in a position of power is treason against God.

Praying that God would bless LGBT, Sodomite, Feminist, Abortionist, Zionist, liberal, international, fascist Presidents is blasphemy!

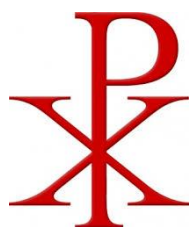
Praying that God would bless lying politicians and depraved, womanizing, degenerate presidents shows the world that Christians are a safe distance from intelligence.

Therefore, it behooves Christians to pray that the dark deeds of these nefarious rulers will be exposed to the light; that the traitorous criminals might be removed from office.

Thus, when it comes to America's pagan politician(s), we pray,

“May his days be few; may another take his office!” (Psalm 109:8).

Addendum



Psalm 3 - Enemies Rising

A Morning Prayer



If you feel like you are facing impossible odds and that your enemies are stronger than death, you are not alone.

There was a day in David's life he didn't have the strength of a pretzel.

With enemies rising, he could have easily drifted into a sea of despair. How did he survive the flood of negative reports?

What should we do when we are overwhelmed with adversity and our enemies are stronger than steel?

Before us is a morning prayer that reveals the key to overcoming the spirit of gloom that seeks to rob us of strength for the day.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE PSALM

Psalm 3:1-8 A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son[1].

The background of this insightful psalm is the civil war between David and his rebel son, Absalom. It was composed during the king's hasty flight from Jerusalem down to the Jordan Valley. His small entourage scrambled to flee the capital city and every face bore witness to the distress. In his flight, David received all kinds of negative reports of Absalom's *coup d'état* and military advancement on the palace. The reports were real and serious.

This is a morning prayer; i. e. it instructs us on how to handle fears that trumpet our doom. Breathing out prayer, David penned this cry for relief that we might know how to pray at the beginning of a day filled with gray clouds and pending disaster.

MULTIPLICATION OF ADVERSARIES

1:1 LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me.

Overwhelmed with the numerous, hostile forces arrayed against him, David's fears scrambled like rabbits for a place to hide. The sheer numbers of Absalom's loyalists and size of his rebel army knocked the wind out of King David. In a state of shock at how quickly the nation he had fought so hard to save from surrounding nations deserted him, David moaned silent prayers to the LORD.

Issues were complex: David's sin; God's discipline; a struggling nation; and, a rebel son. Not only did David have enemies, the chief enemy was a son whom he loved. Who can understand the twisted grief and fatherly love strangling David's heart during the Absalom Revolt?

Furthermore, the fickle crowds adored the young royal. Like the modern day media, the Jerusalem Journal unleashed its bitter invectives against the aging king while touting the praises of the populist prince.

As David faced internal and external enemies — personal, national, and international, the believer also has many adversaries.

There are times in life when Christians awake to strange bedfellows: a Judas in the form of a traitor, political rivals, narcissistic neighbors, or adversaries in the press . . . miscreant State agencies that have turned loose their minions of injustice to capture the believer in a some legal net . . . or maybe jealous church members who have turned into malicious gossip.

And, if this is not enough, the Christian fights the world, the flesh, and the Devil. At times, the battle seems overwhelming . . . even impossible.

3:2 Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah.[2]

As David was fleeing from Absalom, couriers arrived with many negative reports about the size of the rebel army and popularity of the uprising. The reports exaggerated the strength of the revolt and cast gloom on any political survival. His hair turned gray.

Even his closest advisors felt David's cause was lost. Not only did David feel like God had forsaken him, his friends confirmed the cynical voices screaming within his doubting heart. No miracles should be expected! The nation was hopelessly divided. Hostiles abounded. We're all going to die shouted the voice within. This was psychological warfare as the cannons of hopelessness blasted the fortress of David's soul.

Likewise, we need to realize that being victorious in the midst of so much opposition starts with winning the psychological battle. How often do we wake up and hear the cannon fire of thundering doom announce our defeat?

The enemy uses psyops against us launching propaganda artillery shells to cave our confidence in Christ. There are days when duty tastes like chalk, and the base drum of disaster rattles our faith.

When these storm clouds of hopelessness rain despair on our soul, we need to realize the psychological warfare is part of the enemies' strategy to defeat us.

“God has not given us the Spirit of fear” (2 Timothy 1:7).

We dare not look at circumstances or listen to the inner voices of melancholy, but look to God and listen ONLY to His Word.

MEETING WITH THE LORD

3:3-4 But thou, O LORD, art a shield[3] for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill[4]. Selah.

The term “but thou” (atah) is emphatic in Hebrew. In the midst of the spurious rumors that prophesied David’s doom, he reminded himself with vigorous faith that God is his shield and glory—the One who infuses steel strength into his soul. In David’s core, he believed God is his Protector and Provider. So, he prayed . . . oh, how he must have prayed!

While fleeing, David muttered out a prayer the best he could. It wasn’t long or poetic, but it was genuine. The answer did not come immediately. He learned later, after the crisis, that God had answered his plea on the day of his prayer. The answer came from His holy hill. Both David’s throne and God’s throne were in Jerusalem. And, while David had lost his throne, ***God had not lost His!!*** He was at work restraining the powers of the coup d’etat.

We need to keep in mind, in the midst of the upheavals in life, God never ceases to be sovereign. He can act to help us . . . if we are in touch with him . . . if we believe His Word and not the traitorous voices within!

MUCH REST AND SAFETY

3:5 I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me[5].

Despite being battered emotionally from all the negative reports about revolution, and despite having to feel his way through the darkness during his day of flight, David was able to sleep—and to sleep well.

The confidence that God was in control of his imperfect, flawed, embattled life, enabled him to commit his defense to God and to sleep through the first terrible night. David was not a perfect man with a perfect walk, but he served a gracious, supporting, perfect God.

MOUNTING CONFIDENCE

3:6 I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about. [6]

David now asserts the lesson he learned. He reflected on how his soul had been battered by the barrage of negative reports and how his heart was pierced by arrows of fear. Prayer answered, David resolves to never again let fear invade the fortress of his soul. David, with his talons of faith sunk deep into the character of the LORD, makes a choice: “I will not be afraid!”

The battle on the inside is often worse than the battle on the outside. Like David, we need to revisit our faith and to make a choice. ***What are we going to believe:*** our inner fears or the promises of God?

Rather than give into fear and the inner voices that prophesize defeat, we need to examine the heart of God, pray, and commit what we can't control to the One Who controls all things.

Having prayed, we get off our knees, and restfully go about our day's duties.

MAMMOTH CERTAINTY

3:7-8 Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah.[7]

With enemies rising, David blew the trumpet and called God to "Arise" —thus the reason for this psalm. Though David prayed and God answered his prayer, his conflict with Absalom did not end immediately. He continued to pray for deliverance knowing that ultimate deliverance came from the Lord.

"Thou has broken (shabar) the teeth" is a Piel Perfect expressing intensity. Breaking an arm is a horrible fate, but knocking out one's teeth is the worst possible kind of fortune. In the past tense, David speaks as if the bone-breaking defeat of his enemies is a sure thing.

David ends with a benediction asking the Lord to bless His people. "Yeshua" is the word for "salvation" in this text. The precious name of "Jesus" comes from this Hebrew term. Man's hope must be weaned from false hope, and properly placed in the One and Only Sovereign, the Lord Jesus Christ — the covenant keeping Savior of the Old Testament.

David's prayer for deliverance was not self-centered. He did not throw himself a pity party with himself as the only guest. He looked outward, not inward. He got off his knees ***and determined to be a blessing to others!*** His continuance as king was necessary for the benefit of the nation. History proved this to be true. Likewise, all prayer should have as its end a blessing for the people of God.

A note: Depressed people are unbelieving people trapped in a web of self-centeredness with spiders of melancholy sucking out hope in the heart. These folks can't seem to believe God's Word nor do they take a genuine interest in others. They are stuck in a web of doubt concentrated on their own daily troubles. They have a unique ability to discount the suffering of others . . . and are completely deficient in concern for other people. David refused to visit this

island! He did what he could, even in his suffering, to be a blessing to his people. And, so will every man of God.)

In conclusion, when you see enemies rising, pray this prayer. It is a morning prayer designed to free you from the bondage of fear. Sink your talons into the promises of the Lord. Believe God's goodness . . . even though you may not feel his goodness.

Once prayed, leave the results with God. Get off your knees and go to work being a blessing to others. Call friends. Serve a neighbor. Help your spouse. Be a blessing to someone, everyday!

[1] בְּבִרְחוֹ (Qal, infinitive construct, 3rd, m., s) “while or in fleeing”

מִפְּנֵי = “from the face of” Absalom his son.

כַּהֲרִיבוּ (Qal, perfect, 3rd p., s.) “how increased are yr’_c’ my enemies”

רַבִּים Adjective plural = “how much” לָמַרְסָה (Qal ptc.) “increased” עָלַי “upon me”

[2] דְּבָרִים; “how much” אֲמָרִים (Qal ptc., m., pl.) “are saying to my soul, no יְשׁוּעָה salvation to him in Elohim.” David is surrounded by negativity.

[3] “And you, LORD, are a מָגֵן shield בְּעָרְךָ about or upon me, כְּבוֹדִי my glory/abundance/wealth וּמָרְסָה (Hiphil ptc.) raising/exalting רִאשִׁי my head.” Note David’s positive view of God (a shield), the one who raises him up.

[4] “My voice to the LORD אֶקְרָא (Qal, imperf., 1st, s.) I cry, וַיַּעֲנֵנִי (Waw conseq., imperf., 3rd s.) and he heard me מִהָרִי קָדְשִׁי from his holy mountain. Positive answer to prayer.

[5] “וַאֲשַׁנָּה laid myself down and שָׁכַבְתִּי (Qal, waw conseq., imperf. 1st, s., paragogic or emphatic heh) I slept! הִקִּיצוֹתִי (Hiphil, perfect, 1st, s.) I awaken for the LORD יִסְמְכֵנִי (Qal, imperf., 3rd s., 1st suffix) will sustain me.

[6] לֹא־אִירָא (Qal, imperfect, 1st s.) I will not be afraid when ten thousand/myriads people שָׁחֻ around סָבִיב (Qal, perfect, 3rd, pl.) set themselves/put themselves/ around or upon me. David’s future emotional application—No fear, no matter what!

[7] קוּמָה (Qal, imp. 3rd, s., paragogic heh) Rise up, LORD, save me, Elohim, בִּיהֲבִיתָ (Hiphil, perf., 2nd, m., s.) you smite אֶת־כָּל־אֹיְבֵי לִחִי all my enemies upon the שֹׁן tooth/cheek, רָשָׁעִים the wicked שִׁבְרָה (Piel, perfect, 2nd, s.) you smash.

Psalm 4 - The Source of Shalom

Enlarged by Distress



Psalm 4:1 To the chief Musician on Neginoth, A Psalm of David.

A “Neginoth” is a song intended to be played on a musical instrument.

So glorious was Israel’s joy, they had to continually create new songs to express the melody plying in their heart. The psalm is about the Source of Shalom, or finding peace in the midst of a storm.

HIS ADDRESS TO GOD

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.

This song was not created by a psalmist sailing on calm seas or lounging upon beds of ease. He knew the grief of a failed harvest and the sharp criticism of proud and wealthy men. He learned that God used trials not to diminish him, but to develop him. There is something about troubles that can make a man better and not bitter.

“Hear me” is an imperative, the mood of prayer. Of first concern is, “Hear me when I call!”

Prayer is useless if God doesn’t hear, and God does not hear the rebel’s prayer (Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 59:2). Only righteous men have a hearing in God’s Court.

David knew he had a right to be there, but he also knew that he had no innate qualities that would attract God to himself. God was the Source of his preferential standing. All men are sinners. But, those who believe in Christ gain a right standing before the thrice holy God and are declared “holy and blameless” in his sight (Ephesians 1:3 ,4). Whatever goodness, holiness, or knowledge I possess comes from You, O God.

Believe it, enjoy it, and claim it!

The term “enlarged” is a term of deliverance. It means “to expand” or “to relieve pressure” or “to grow or be enlarged.” At the beginning of his day, David felt an elephant sitting on his chest. At the conclusion of his day, David reflected on his progress. He realized that God was at work relieving the pressure. The trials of the day improved the man. They were given as gift, not to harm him, but to help him.

But, more needed to be done! He pleaded two more causes: have mercy upon me, and hear my evening prayer.

HIS ADDRESS TO MEN

2 O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah.

The psalmist now has a message for his enemies. Before speaking to men, David first spoke to God. David's stress had its source in the "sons of men." His salvation had its source in the LORD God.

As a king, David had political adversaries. No doubt he felt the deep criticism of his administration from politicians, the aristocracy in the nation. Everyone was an expert on what the king should be doing. Surrounded by godless, self-centered, narcissistic people, David charged them with three violations of God's law:

First, they turned his glory into shame. Possibly, the political critic sought to destroy his reputation; diminish his holdings; and to deface his property.

Second, these men loved vanity; that is, having no heart for God or virtue, they entertained murderous plots, plunder, and the pursuit of pleasure.

Third, the sons of men sought after leasing. The term "leasing" (kazab) refers to envious schemes designed to deprive men of their property in violation of the Tenth Commandment.

David found himself surrounded by a trinity of evil doers: skimmers, schemers, and scammers.

Three commands were broken: slander is a form of murder; love of vanity is idolatry; and, "leasing" includes Machiavellian commercial tactics -- a violation of the Command "Thou shall not covet." "Selah" means to "stop and think about this."

Schemers are on every street corner and in every government office. They are clearly exposed by David's question; that is, the weeds of greed and envy were deeply rooted in the hearts of the shrewd and cunning.

HIS ADDRESS TO HIMSELF

3 But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him.

"Know" is an imperative; that is, "Get to know this!" The LORD distinguishes between the righteous and the unrighteous.

In contrast to the arachnids among men who spin their webs of deceit in order to trap the innocent in their commercial schemes are those whom God has set

apart for His special delight. While the Lord is displeased with the opportunists, He takes pleasure in His elect. You are his special treasure, and he who touches you touches God's property. Because of this, God's man expresses confidence that the Lord will hear his prayers.

4 Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.

David offers his counsel to his people in song.

In the LXX (Septuagint), "stand in awe" is translated, "Be angry and sin not" — quoted by Paul in Ephesians 4:26. The word "stand in awe" means "to tremble, quiver, or be agitated." Too many touch sin and tremble not.

The trouble with the cosmopolitan men is a lack of the fear of God. If men do not contemplate the power of the Almighty, wisdom escapes them. For the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. When men are not afraid to sin, trouble lurks around every corner.

David advises men to be silent and to engage in quiet contemplation about the Lord. Apparently, the scarcity of the fear of God was due to busyness and thoughtlessness.

In modern times, the new priest of society are psychologists whose main goal is to train people how to have peace while rebelling against God's law. David's advice is "sin not." Modern secular men do not believe there is any such thing as sin, so they advise youth to be free and to sin without feeling guilt. They tell them they are still a good person even though their acts are despicable — a belief that originated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

5 Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD.

David continues his counsel to men and urges them to walk on the narrow, road of righteousness; that is, to take the high road of goodness, and to avoid the low road of lewdness.

He wants God-fearing people to trust God, and to obey His law-word.

"There is a way that seems right unto man." (Proverbs 24:12)

Most men attend Sham University majoring in the vice of "MY WAYISM." It is called liberalism and relativism. There is no black and white at SU, all things are gray. In these halls of lower learning there are no absolutes. Everything is relative.

Since there is no consensus on right and wrong, the humanistic man cannot agree upon what is evil or define what is good. Pluralism and confusion mark the culture.

Multiculturalism is touted as a strength instead of a weakness to overcome. Thus, the totalitarian State arises to keep peace among a divided people. Only God can define what is right. David encourages the nation to walk in the revelation of God's righteousness; that is, choose His law and reject man's multi-ethical universe.

"Trust in the Lord" stands in juxtaposition to trust in self or the pompous State (Psalm 118:8-9).

If men would obey the proceeding verse, they would realize they are sinners in need of a Savior. When the Hebrews sinned, they brought a lamb to the altar — a righteous sacrifice. Likewise, God has provided a Lamb sufficient to cleanse the greatest sinner. Come to Calvary and behold the Lamb. Trust in Him and the treasures of salvation will be yours. At the end of the day, offer the sacrifice of praise (Psalm 50:23).

HIS SECOND ADDRESS TO GOD

6 There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

There are many voices that challenge the benefit of being a Christian. Surely, it is easier to walk by sight than by faith; to pursue the material than to seek the spiritual; to believe in man than to believe in God. Man's thoughts are attracted to earth rather than heaven; to the works of men rather than to the works of God.

Men would rather work than believe; build their wealth than to grow in wisdom; to feed their feelings than to feed their faith. To kings, money is the answer to all things (Ecclesiastes 10:19).

But, to God's man the key to life is the sunshine of His favor, "the light of Thy countenance upon us." (See Numbers 6:26).

The smile of God upon us is better than piles of cash around us. Better to have His sunbeams than to have gold hidden in the shadows of a vault.

7 Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.

All of man's energies and pleasures are wrapped up in pursuit of the material. There is nothing that brings more happiness to a man than a full harvest, a profitable business, or a burgeoning bank account. Prosperity warms the heart of man like the morning Sun; but, poverty unleashes the terrors of the night.

The psalmist shares a joy that is greater than a farmer's harvest. Many a saint has looked at an empty flour barrel and shouted, "Praise God."

Spurgeon said, "Christ in the heart is better than corn in the barn."

A sip of sweet Jesus is better than a jug of honeyed wine. If I owned the world, but have not Christ, I am bankrupt; If my field is fallow, but have the Savior, I have a feast.

The psalmist is not saying his godly ones do not need corn and wine. Rather, he is glorying in the root as well as the fruit. God, not man, is the source of blessings. God's grace, not man's sweat, is the first principle of abundance.

8 I will both lay me down in peace(shalom), and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.

Men do not sleep well without their wealth. A drop in the stock market; an unexpected expense; and a declining bank account is the cause of many restless nights.

One does not need shekels to have shalom. The Christian knows he can find peace with only pennies in his pocket.

The psalmist sees the Lord as his **only** (badad) source of security. "You alone (badad) make me dwell in safety. " "dwell" is a Hiphil causative verb. See "alone" in Deuteronomy 32:12.

Thus, the psalmist finds his source of shalom in the LORD. His peace in the midst of his personal storm is anchored to the promises of God.

The pragmatic man finds solace in corn, wine, and wealth; but, the man of faith finds solace in his relationship with the God who enables men to produce corn, wine, and wealth.

Heaven, not earth, is the source of shalom— peace comes by Jesus Christ and not by acts of the State (Acts 10:36).

Acts 10:36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:

A Prayer for America

by the Sons of Jeremiah

Lamentations 5

Restore Us to Yourself, O LORD

- 1 Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us;
look, and see our disgrace!
- 2 Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers,
our homes to foreigners.
- 3 We have become orphans, fatherless;
our mothers are like widows.
- 4 We must pay for the water we drink;
the wood we get must be bought.
- 5 Our pursuers are at our necks;
we are weary; we are given no rest.
- 6 We have given the hand to Egypt, and to Assyria,
to get bread enough.
- 7 Our fathers sinned, and are no more;
and we bear their iniquities.
- 8 Slaves rule over us;
there is none to deliver us from their hand.
- 9 We get our bread at the peril of our lives,
because of the sword in the wilderness.
- 10 Our skin is hot as an oven
with the burning heat of famine.
- 11 Women are raped in Zion,
young women in the towns of Judah.
- 12 Princes are hung up by their hands;
no respect is shown to the elders.
- 13 Young men are compelled to grind at the mill,
and boys stagger under loads of wood.
- 14 The old men have left the city gate,
the young men their music.
- 15 The joy of our hearts has ceased;
our dancing has been turned to mourning.
The crown has fallen from our head;
woe to us, for we have sinned!
- 17 For this our heart has become sick,
for these things our eyes have grown dim,
- 18 for Mount Zion which lies desolate;
jackals prowl over it.
- 19 But you, O LORD, reign forever;

your throne endures to all generations.
20 Why do you forget us forever,
why do you forsake us for so many days?
21 Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored!
Renew our days as of old—
22 unless You can have utterly rejected us,
and you remain exceedingly angry with us

(Author Unknown)

Is there hope? Yes, there is! The remedy is simple, but nearly impossible for a dull, depraved nation:

Amos 5:6 Seek the Lord AND LIVE . . .

Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored!

A Prayer for Revival

Habakkuk 3

Here is a prayer from a man who loved his country -- a prayer from a patriot burdened down with the sins of his nation.

His was a people that needed to be saved from enemies within (Habakkuk 1:1-4).

After a period of practicing the discipline of silence, he found peace in the sovereignty of the LORD (2:20).

1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth.

Knew insight:

"Shigionoth" seems to be a kind of chorus that conveys emotion. Expressions often come in threes in this section.

Having practiced the wisdom of silence in the previous chapter (2:20), and having heard the pronouncement of judgment, Habakkuk gained new insight into the character of God and the future of his people. Seeing a glimpse of the slate grey future, the prophet fell on his knees hope growing. He begins in prayer and ends in praise.

2 O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy. Awe: "O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid."

That God answered his first two prayers spawned fear in the heart of the prophet. The word "afraid" does not refer to a fleshly fear of the future, but to awe and wonder that his LORD reigns over the nations. This is a holy fear that transcends the moral recklessness of the age . . . a fear that angels praise because it grasps the sovereignty of the Eternal God.

Astonished by the omniscience, omnipotence, and the wisdom of Israel's King, the wonder of God swelled within his heart.

Hope for Revival

Habakkuk complained about violence, strife, and contention among his careless people in chapter one. Neglect of law produces sin. Sin produces sin, wrong produces wrong, crime produces crime, and moral permissiveness infects generations (1:3). The

apostate nation needed a moral and legal revival -- a return to obedience of the law of the LORD God.

Like weeds in a garden, backsliders are weighed down with thorny problems. Every carnal endeavor is like walking barefoot on a field full of goat heads or running a marathon wearing moon boots in a pool of goo. Israel wasn't dead. She walked in a poppy field that invited moral slumber. Though lapsed in her duty to God, she still had the breath of life. She only needed to be revived. Revival is not for the dead, but for the living. It is not for the wicked, but for the righteous.

"Revive, O LORD," prays the prophet. "You" is the subject of the prayer. Only the LORD can revive the soul.

The object of the verb is "work"-- His great plan of redemption and the task of making a holy people. We are the ones in need of revival, not the pagan world. "We are the clay and Thou our Potter, and we are all the work of Thy Hands" Isaiah 64:8). Revive us, O Lord. Revive your church.

Reformation is renewal of Biblical doctrine; revival is a renewal of holy energies to obey the Lord. American churches need both. Begin with me.

Hope for Mercy

Committing great violations against God's law, Israel deserved judgment ("wrath"). Being in Court gave the prophet new insight, not only into the justice of God, but the mercy of God. Not only is the LORD just, His Court is rich in grace. "In wrath, remember mercy" prayed the prophet (2:2).

INSIGHT INTO THE POWER OF GOD

3 God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

Praise for the healing warmth of God's presence:

Teman is in the land of Edom. Paran is the ancient name of Mt. Sinai in Arabia. Both places are located south east of Jerusalem-- the place of the rising sun. In his silence, the light shined. As the golden rays of sun crack the darkness over Teman and Paran splattering colors on the canvas of the earth, the glistening sunbeams of God's glory illuminate the pilgrim path in Habakkuk's gray world clouded with grief.

Just as gleams of sunlight flash their lucent radiance in the early morning behind curtains of darkness to bring a smile to the eyes, the golden rays of God's reign dance in

the mind's eye warming the heart of the Pilgrim stricken with the gloomy world of politics.

The remedy for darkness is light. "Let your light shine before men."

4 And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power.

The glory of God's presence and His activity among men is like the brightness of the Sun that splashes the clouds with rays of yellow and pink. Opening its petals of glory for all to enjoy, sunlight provides a feast for the eyes, warmth for the heart, and healing for creation.

"Horns" refer to the golden rays of God's power at work among the nations. Before Him the darkness flees ([Psalm 18:12](#)). As shadows surrender to the light, stubborn man must surrender to the light of the gospel.

The Hiding of His Power

Just as man cannot look directly at the yellow Sun rising from the east, men cannot look directly at the amber glows of holiness radiating from the throne of God. As a furnace shields man from the scarlet-flames of a burning fire, there is a hiding of His blazing power.

"Valuable things are hidden, and hard to get" - Mohammed Ali

As the Sun hides behind the horizon, clouds, and mountains, God hides the core of His power.

Consider the hiding of God to Job during his painful affliction; and,

Consider the hiding of God as He gave His law to Israel at Mt. Sinai; and,

Consider the hiding of God in Christ at His incarnation (John 1:1, 14); and,

Consider the hiding of God in Christ at the cross reconciling the world unto himself (1 Corinthians 1:18); and,

Consider the hiding of the power of God to the strong:

2 Corinthians 12:9, "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me;" and,

Consider the hiding of God's power in the madness in today's politics (Daniel 4:34-35); and,

Consider nothing is hidden from God:

Proverbs 14:3 "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

Consequently, there is a need for prayer:

Ephesians 1:18-20, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms . . ."

5 Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. 6 He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.

When Habakkuk peered into throne room of His Majesty in Heaven, he painted a picture on the canvas of Holy writ for the mind to enjoy. He switches metaphors from nature to a military motif.

The LORD reigns! As a "Man of War," He is not passively sitting idle letting the enemy strengthen his position. He sees. He fights. He kills. He defeats. He wins. He makes the wrath of man (the insanity of politics) to praise Him, and the remainder of His wrath (idiocy) he restrains (Psalm 76:10).

As a general orders the marine corp ahead of the invasion of the main regiment to weaken the enemy, our LORD sends his troops of terror to scatter enemy combatants.

"Pestilence" refers to His use of disease, plagues, and viral pandemics to judge mankind. "Pestilence" is a metaphor for an army's sortees to soften the enemy before the main force reaches the killing fields (Exodus 23:27; Psalm 68:1-2).

"Burning coals" is singular -- "burning coal" - - a reference to fever -- a symbol of resolve and the heat of holiness. This Captain has intensity without anxiety; focus without frenzy; force without indiscretion.; and fury without foolishness. The LORD

knows no defeat and no retreat. He marches to the bloody battlefield with undiminished resolve to defeat his foes and save His lambs.

"He stood" represents our Lord's personal concern and investment in the outcome of the battle. Habakkuk is all about God's intense focus on plenary reparations for national sins.

"Measuring the earth" is a metaphor representing surgical accuracy and measured, calculated judgment. When the LORD declares war on his enemies there is no backfire, misfire, or "friendly fire." Some pestilences impact every nation on earth. Metaphors like dividing *the nations* and scattering the *everlasting mountains* represent the LORD's crushing victory over His enemies -- over powerful rulers -- over arrogant governments -- over the nations and their deep state propagandists.

'His ways are everlasting,' inform us that the God of yesteryear is still God today. He does not change.

7 I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

The prophet visits the past as if it were present, and presents the future as if it were past. His perspective is eternal rather than temporal . . . international rather than provincial. Every act of salvation in the past is a promise of future salvation for God's people.

Cushan is a synonym for Syria and Midian was an enemy with territory south east of the Dead Sea. As God defeated Syria and Midian in the day of the judges under Gideon, He will crush all future enemies of Israel as in the "day of Midian" (Judges 3:8-10; 7:1-8:10; Isaiah 9:4).

[Note: by "Israel" we refer to God's work in ancient Israel resulting in the creation of the church or "spiritual Israel," not modern day atheistic Askhenazi Zionist so-called "Israel."]

8 Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation?

In reflecting on the sovereignty of the LORD, Habakkuk traces the steps of Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea during the exodus-days of Moses and Joshua. Two questions are asked. Was God angry at the Rivers (Red Sea, Jordan River)?

The answer is "No!" God does not wage war against the earth or nature, but against men. War is political. Evil is not in the environment. It is in humanity. Evil men invite war. He rides His chariots and commands His quadriga of horses, not only to sack the wicked, but to save His people.

9 Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.

Images of a naked bow and split rivers informs us of the extremes God will go to to save His people. A naked quiver refers to employment of all his arrows to defeat the enemy. Rivers are a natural barrier that thwart imperialistic ambitions of active armies. The "oath of the tribes" refers to the Messianic Promises in the Abrahamic covenant wherein God's people "should be saved from their enemies, and from the hand of all that hate them."

This is Habakkuk's way of informing us that God keeps his promises; that the LORD will not withhold one good thing from them that trust Him; that He is the great Promise Keeper; that His Word is His bond; that He is active in saving His people.

Oh, the wonders of Calvary where God emptied his quiver to defeat Satan, sin, and death . . . to save you and me by giving His Son "to save His people from their sins." The cross represents God's naked vault and the pouring out of His love for humanity. There, the heavenly Father spent His entire war chest to redeem His elect. In giving His Son to be the Savior of the world, He gave us His all! Selah!

10 The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high.

Drawing upon the imagery of the Exodus from Egypt, the prophet plows through victories past to claim victories future.

Surely, since God redeemed Israel at the Red Sea, He will complete His redemptive work among His people. And, He did at Calvary.

11 The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear.

Arrows and spears are icons of war. To save men, God declares war on His enemies. His enemies are our enemies. Powermongers like Pharaoh and the kings of Canaan sought to conquer and enslave humanity. Politics is a war about who will rule

and who will serve; what law will prevail, and what law will fail; who will feast, and who will fast.

Liberals, Marxists and atheists seek to conquer us. Yes, we fight sin in our person, but we also fight sin working through legislators and judges.

Thus, the Christian life is a military life. Like Israel, we follow the Lord Who is a "Man of War" (Exodus 15:3). Like Israel, believers must learn the art of combat ([Judges 3:1-3](#)).

Visual verbs employed by Miriam after observing the crushing defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea come to mind: hurled, drowned, sank, shattered, threw down, and consumed (Exodus 15).

In the work of revival, God is able to make the moon and stars stand still as He did in the days of the conquest; "God cast down great stones from heaven upon" His enemies and they died; and "the sun stood still, and the moon stayed" ([Joshua 3:10-11](#)). God's judgments are always noon day for His people, and midnight for His enemies.

12 Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger.

To Habakkuk, the LORD is everlasting ([1:12](#)). He does not change. The past is the present and the present is the past. The same powers the LORD used against His enemies in the past are in His arsenal today. As God declared war on the Canaanites, the prophet looks toward the temple with hope that LORD's engines of war will be employed against the wicked, and that they will be slaughtered as in the day of Midian ([Judges 7-8](#); Habakkuk 3:7).

Habakkuk did not live long enough to see Babylon fall . . . in one day . . . in one hour under the armies of Cyrus. But, it happened.

13 Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah.

Again, the past is used as an argument of what God should do in the present. Habakkuk reviews the LORD's wars against Israel's enemies, and how he unleashed His weapons of terror upon them in order to save His people. As He crushed the Midianites and Amalekites, the prophet liens the LORD to do it again. As He slew the two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb ([Judges 7:25](#)), the prophet petitions the King to declare war against his enemies and to execute the rebels of his time.

14 Thou didst strike through with his staves (staff, spears) the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me (us): their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly.

Habakkuk paints a graphic picture of the spiritual character of his enemies. As Pharaoh put Jacob's family in chains and fetters, and later pushed God's fleeing people into the Red Sea; and, as Sisera plowed over God's people with iron chariots on the Plains of Megiddo; and, as Midian descended like locusts on Israel's breadbasket to plunder Israel's wheat harvest; and, as the Persian administrators sought to put Daniel to death in the lion's den, so did God's enemies in Habakkuk's day.

As God drove a spear into the heads of these wicked nations . . . into the head of Sisera, Habakkuk wishes the LORD to do the same in his time. Just as the Canaanite kings derived a sadistic pleasure ("their rejoicing") in afflicting pain on the LORD's people, neo-pagans of our time relish spreading misery among Christians, defiling Easter and Christmas, and making them suffer under the cruelty of liberal policies like taxing people into poverty, killing babies, and pushing Sodomy on our youth.

15 Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters.

This is imagery of the LORD crushing Pharaoh's cavalry at the Red Sea under a mega-tsunami of cliff high waves. Seeing His armies on the march again, troubled the Prophet.

PEACE WITH GOD

16 When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.

Having reviewed the power of God and His conquest over His enemies, Habakkuk describes his response to this revelation. Butterflies in the stomach, quivering lips, weakness in the bones, and nervous tremors is Habakkuk's way of informing us that he took God's Word seriously.

Disturbed by Israel's political descent into hell, Habakkuk prayed for perspective. God answered. As he rehearsed God's saving work following the Exodus, an inexplicable peace settled in his soul.

As God intervened to save Israel from her enemies, he anticipated the LORD would again save His people. Habakkuk trembled because so many in Israel had turned from the law to become the enemies of God: "But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, *and* he fought against them" (Isaiah 63:10).

Identifying fully with the holiness and sovereignty of the LORD, the prophet tapped into a resource that enabled him to find "rest in the day of trouble." Praying and finding peace, he finishes his work with praise.

PRAISE FOR GOD

17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

Figs, grapes, olives, wheat and barley, sheep and goats, cattle and oxen represent the necessities of life. Take away these essential crops, and you face destitution as a nation.

With the LORD's announcement that He was going to send the Chaldeans as His rod of chastisement, the clouds over Israel's future turned shades of grey. Visions of marching troops, broken gates, and grey corpses haunted the mind of the prophet. Who can describe the anguish of failed crops and a gut wrenching famine for man and beast? The only colors on the palette to paint the grief and distress of people who face starvation are coin grey and pale white.

Though the happiness of a nation depends on its golden harvest, Habakkuk found joy and security in Another.

Seeing the gathering clouds of judgment and having felt the knots twisting in his soul, Habakkuk looked above the stormy horizon. With the eye of faith, the prophet saw that the LORD that controls the forces of deprivation, and his eyes smiled. While quietly waiting in silence for an answer from God, he contemplated the truth "the LORD is in holy temple." As a ship lowers its anchor into the bay to keep it from drifting out to sea, Habakkuk had an anchor behind the veil that kept his soul from crashing into coastline of doubt. The prophet tapped into a source of comfort that rises above nature.

Because his soul was in tune with the LORD, his whole being hummed with joy.

He is not saying he didn't need corn, fruits, and meat. Rather, he takes comfort in the sovereignty and love of God -- in a faith full of promises. The past acts of salvation like the exodus are down payments on salvation to come.

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

His security shifts from the physical to the spiritual, from the material to the eternal. There is a joy greater than a full harvest, and a sense of wellbeing independent of a vat of wine, a barrel of olive oil, or sacks of flour. Many a man has stared into an empty cupboard and discovered hidden treasures in the God of His salvation (Exodus 15:2; Psalm 18:2; 25:5).

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold

I'd rather be his than have riches untold
I'd rather have Jesus than houses
or land
Yes I'd rather be led by his nail pierced hands
Than to be the king
of a best domain and beheld in sins dread sway
I'd rather have Jesus than
anything this world affords today [vibes]
I'd rather have Jesus than
worldly applause

I'd rather be faithful to his dear cause
I'd rather have Jesus than world
wide things

I'd rather be true to his holy name
Than to be the king...

Songwriters: Luther Green Presley

19 The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

Despite God's announcement that an abyss of black hang over Israel's future, Habakkuk doesn't color his destiny with dingy grey. The skies over the prophet remained beautiful. Rays of sunshine from the throne of God warmed his confidence. As long as the LORD ruled the universe, he had hope for a bright future.

With the eye of faith, he claims the LORD God as his strength, that the LORD would be his security on treacherous trails, that God would deliver Him from the bottoms and cause him to walk in high places under the care of his Lord.

Such a glorious prayer with such lofty lyrics deserves to be set to music so that all can hear and enter into the joy of the faith (2:4) -- a joy that only comes by practicing silence before Him who is in His Holy temple (2:20).

Thus, the remedy for frustration with politics in a nation stricken with neo-pagans is to see the LORD in His holy temple, to grasp His authority over the nations (2:20), and to walk by faith (2:4). Simple to say, but difficult to apply. May the Lord help all who call on His name.

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